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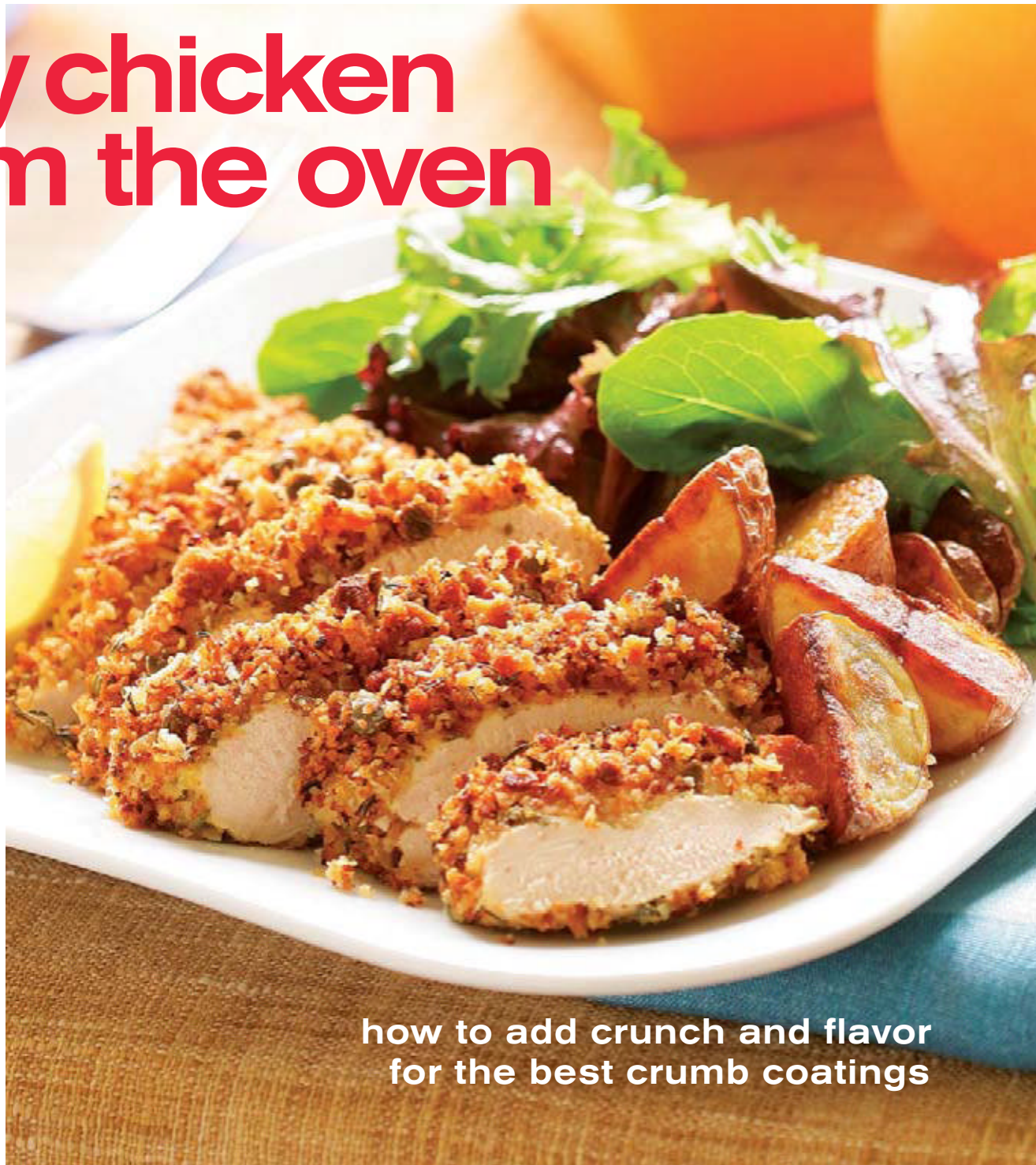
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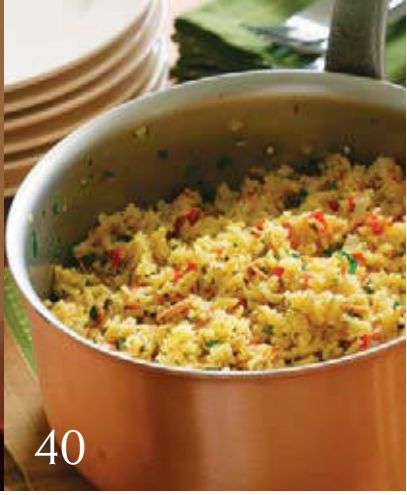
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RECIPE FOLDOUT

26A Favorite Winter Pastas
Seven hearty dishes to get you through the cold months



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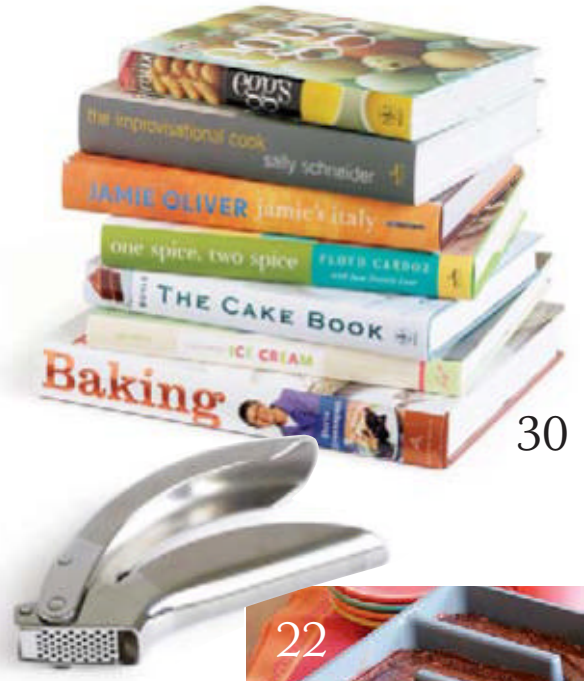
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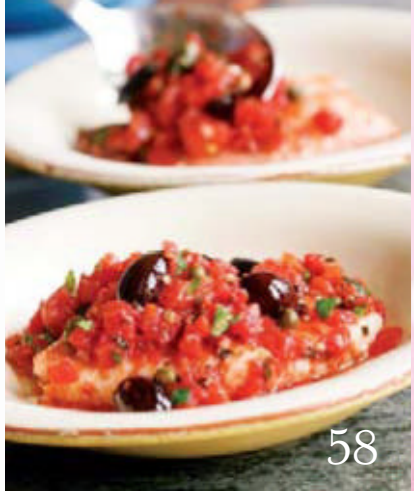




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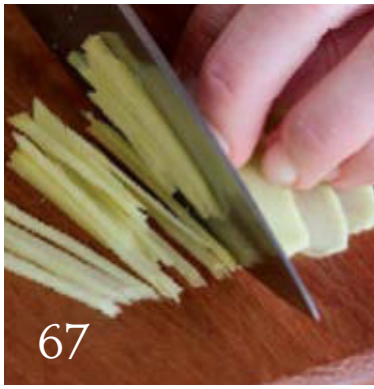
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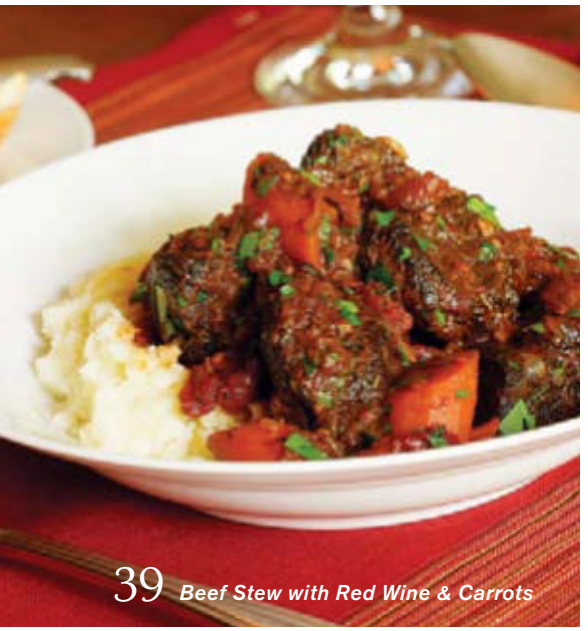




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- ◆ QUICK
  Under 45 minutes
- ◆ MAKE AHEAD
  Can be completely prepared ahead but may need reheating and a garnish to serve
- ◆ MOSTLY MAKE AHEAD
  Can be partially prepared ahead but will need a few finishing touches before serving
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  May contain eggs and dairy ingredients



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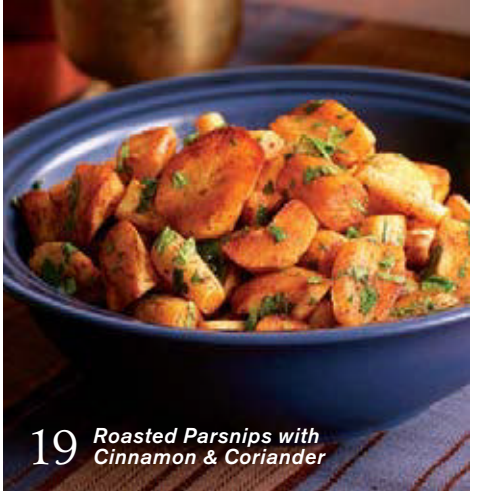
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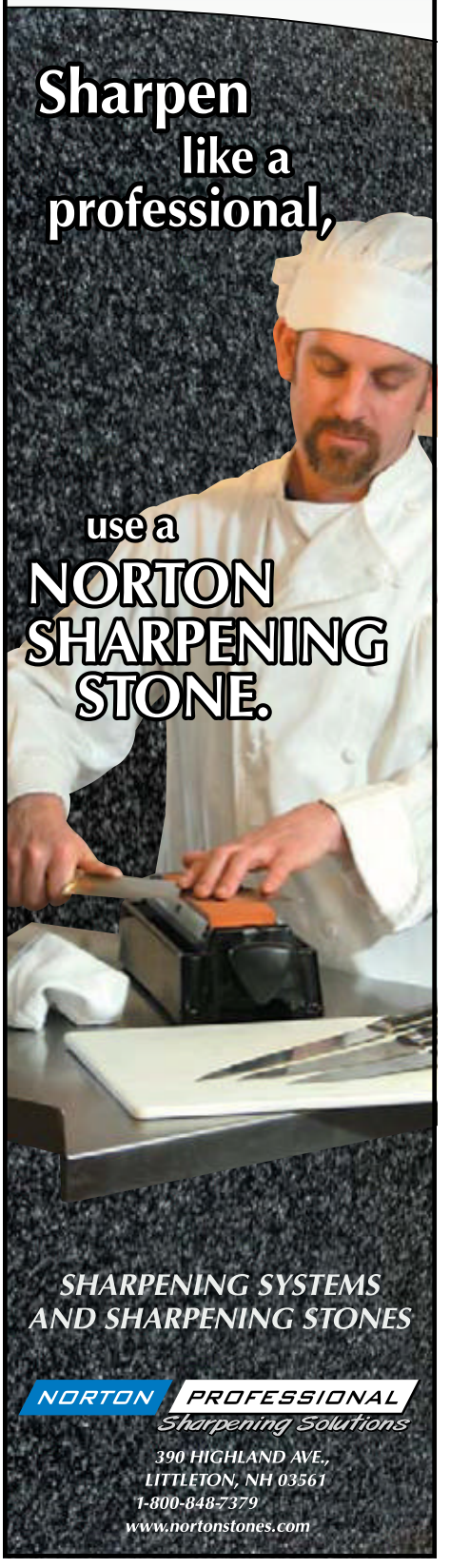
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menus

Simmer away the winter blues

If the weather has you down, chin up. The nastier it gets outside, the more excuses we have to stay inside, indulging our cravings for the rich, soul-satisfying fare we love. The bistro menu below is the perfect antidote to the winter doldrums. And when the cold temperatures break, look to the weeknight inspirations here for fast meals with fresh flavor.

Note: Before you start cooking, be sure to check the yield of every recipe; you might have to double or halve a recipe.

A comforting bistro supper

If you have time, make the entrée and crème brûlée a day ahead, but don't caramelize the brûlée topping until just before serving.

Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage, *back cover*

Chicken with Vinegar & Onions (Poulet au Vinaigre), *p. 37*

Roasted Parsnips with Cinnamon and Coriander, *p. 19*

Classic Crème Brûlée, *p. 46*

WINE: A bright, crisp red like the 2004 Borgogno Barbera d'Alba ($18)

Saturday night dinner party

Early in the day, assemble the tarts and prep the ingredients for the rice pilaf and salmon. Pop the pear tarts in the oven when the salmon comes out (remember to increase the oven temperature), and they'll be ready to serve once you've cleared the table.

Salmon Braised in Pinot Noir, *p. 60*

Saffron Rice Pilaf with Red Pepper & Toasted Almonds, *p. 41*

Free-Form Pear Tarts with Almond & Cinnamon, *p. 64*

WINE: A supple, fruity Pinot Noir like the 2005 Edna Valley ($16)

Intimate Valentine's evening

Dinner with your special someone calls for something beyond the everyday, but with the holiday falling on a weeknight, that can be challenging. This quick and do-ahead menu makes it easy—the lamb chops broil in less than 15 minutes, and the dessert can be mostly made ahead.

Arugula salad with toasted hazelnuts, goat cheese, and a lemony vinaigrette

Lamb Chops with Lemon, Thyme & Mustard Butter, *p. 78a*

Rice Pilaf with Sage, Parmigiano & Prosciutto, *p. 44*

Phyllo "Chips" with Vanilla Ice Cream & Strawberry Mash "Dip," *p. 63*

WINE: A Cabernet blend like the 2005 Penfolds Rawson's Retreat Cabernet Shiraz ($9)

Four global weeknight pairings

Mexican

Lime Chicken with Poblano Sour Cream, *p. 78a*

Southwestern Rice Pilaf, *p. 43*

Japanese

Tuna Teriyaki with Scallion Salad, *p. 78a*

Roasted Eggplant with Chiles, Peanuts & Mint, *p. 55*

Mediterranean

Crispy Chicken Breasts with Lemon & Capers, *p. 50*

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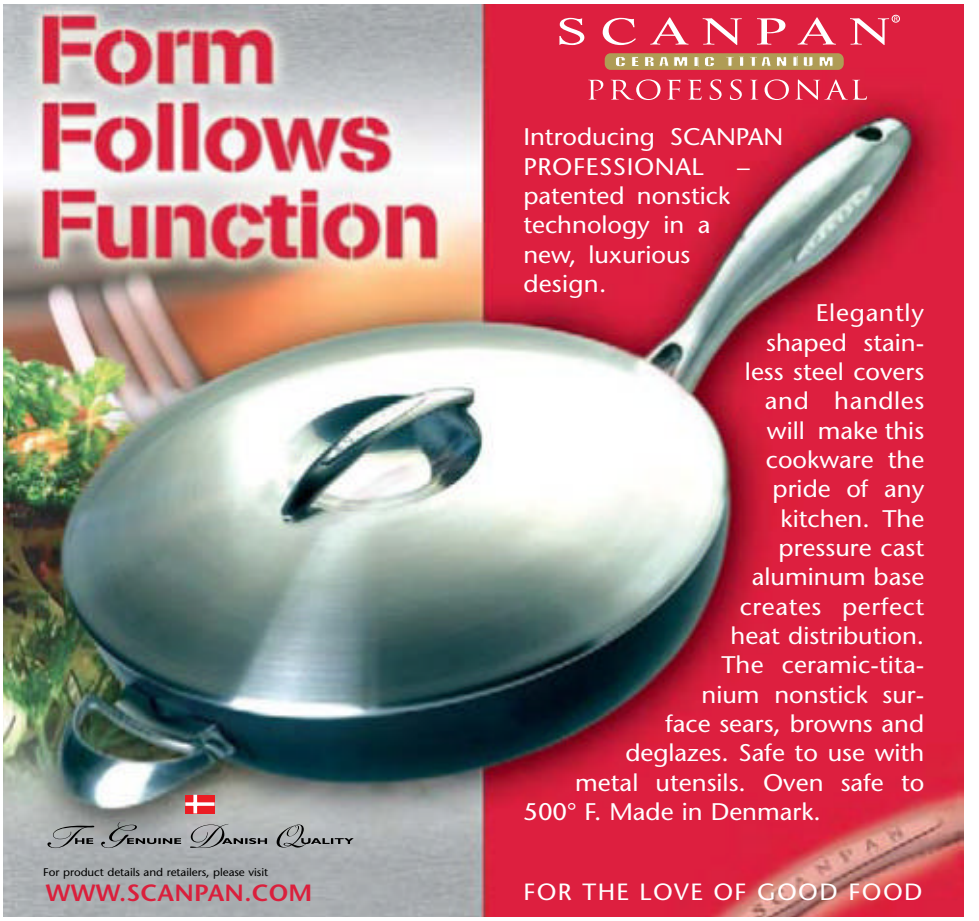
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from the editor

Get Your Mess in Place
...or how to prep like the pros

On my first day of culinary school, I learned how to wield a big knife and still keep all 10 fingers intact. The next day (or maybe it was the next hour), I learned to gather all my ingredients before starting to cook. OK, I remember thinking, my mother taught me this years ago; this cooking school thing isn't going to be so hard. This being a French cooking school,



though, they used a fancy name—*mise en place*—for getting organized. This is a phrase my mother definitely did not use. Pronounced MEEZ ahn plahs (and "mess in place" by my husband), it means "put everything in its place."

It turns out that having your "mise" done (as you'll hear restaurant chefs say) is about much more than just gathering your ingredients; it's about getting ready to cook so that when you start, your recipe will hum along like a well-choreographed number. You won't have to stop to run down to the basement for a special pot or to the neighbors for a forgotten ingredient. You won't have to let your fluffy egg whites deflate while you butter your ramekins, or let your breaded chicken get soggy while the oven heats.

It's not hard to get in the habit of doing your mise; in fact, if you put on your favorite CD, pour a sip of your favorite libation, and get into the groove, prepping can be one of the most pleasurable aspects of cooking. Even your weeknight cooking will come together a little more smoothly if you follow a few of our prep tips below:

Buy several sets of measuring spoons (instead of just one) and break them apart into individual measures. Keep them out in a cup or jar so that you can access them easily. Do the same with measuring cups and liquid measures—have several in each size and store them near your prep area.

Lay in a stash of little prep bowls. Sets of stainless-steel bowls in all sizes are good bargains at restaurant supply stores, but ceramic or melamine bowls work just fine, too. You'll use these again and again for minced garlic, diced vegetables, and chopped herbs. If you're prepping for several dishes at once (before a big dinner party, say), set the prep bowls on trays or sheet pans and label them with scraps of paper to remind you which dish the prep is for.

In your prep area, set up a tray of the ingredients you use most frequently, like kosher salt, good-quality olive oil, red pepper flakes, a black pepper grinder, a basic vinegar, a bowl of sugar.

Designate a convenient location for knife storage and cutting board storage. Keep your knives and boards close to your sink and trash area. Always start your prep by setting up a large cutting board (secure it in place by putting a damp towel underneath) with one or two of your most-used knives nearby. Set out a mixing bowl to use for scraps, and a dishtowel or two on the side.

Don't forget to dress comfortably. If it gets you in the zone, put an apron on (my mother can't cook without one); whatever you do, take thirty seconds to change into comfortable shoes before you start to cook. The favorite shoes of restaurant chefs are sturdy clogs, like those made by Dansko (for sources, see p. 72). They're slip resistant, and their good support means fewer back aches. Running sneakers are a good option, too.

Read first, then prep. While I know it seems obvious, our test kitchen manager would kill me if I didn't implore you to read the recipes thoroughly before starting. Yes, make sure you've got all your ingredients, but also be sure to prep them exactly as the ingredient list states. Dice your onions, peel and grate your ginger, plump your raisins in wine, and slice your pork into ½-inch medallions.

From the bistro favorites on p. 33 to the playful desserts on p. 62 , the delicious recipes in this issue of *Fine Cooking* are fun to both prep and cook. It's a great time of year to be in the kitchen, so get your mess in place and start cooking.

—Susie Middleton, editor

When Opportunity Knocks . . .



Gail had been working in the medical field, first as a medical assistant, then as a surgical tech. The long evening surgery hours resulted in limited time at home with her family. After years, a change was needed. She came across an ad about Personal Chefs, and having a passion for food, she decided to call. "I simply needed more time at home, and to reclaim my time as my own"

Gail enrolled with the Culinary Business Academy to obtain specialized business knowledge to secure her success with this new venture. "The day I got home from training, my sister hired me as a Personal Chef." Gail has never looked back. Cooking for a wide variety of clients allows both professional and personal satisfaction, plus time for herself. Gail's advice: "Have passion and faith in yourself. Do what you love and your clients will love you for doing it!"

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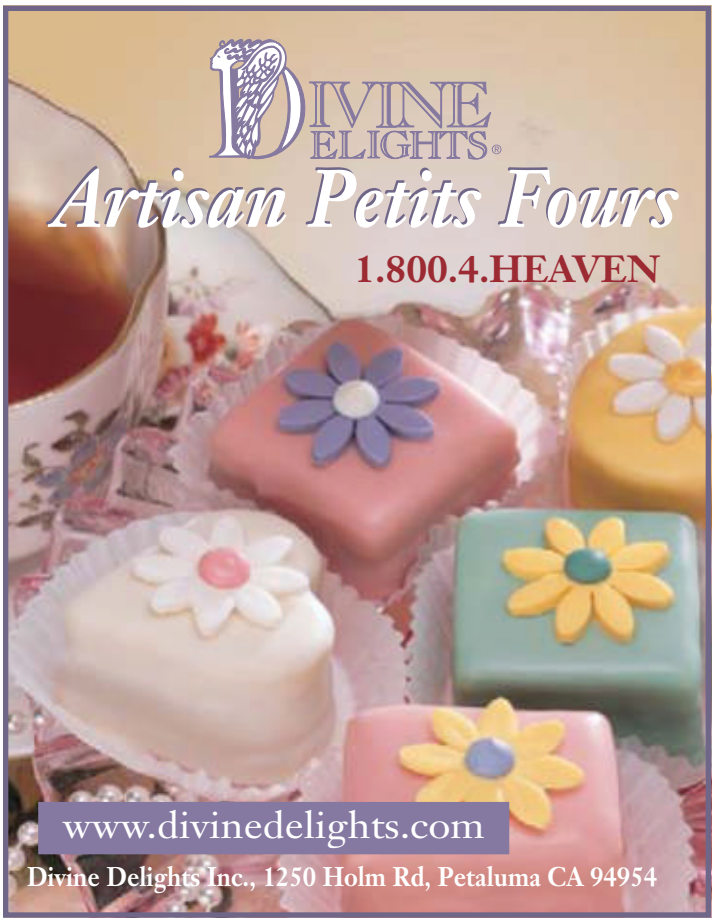
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from our readers

A salty story

A quick note to congratulate you on a great magazine. I look forward to each issue and always find recipes to try. In your December 2006 issue (*Fine Cooking* #82), however, I do question the Green Beans with Mustard-Tarragon Vinaigrette ("Green Beans on the Side," by Ris Lacoste). Why in the world did you recommend using ¼ cup salt for boiling the 1½ pounds of beans? I'm used to salting water to cook fresh vegetables—but ¼ cup? I used far less salt, 1 tablespoon, for the recipe, and also needed only half the amount of vinaigrette suggested. The results were excellent.

—Marion Dunham, via email

Ris Lacoste replies: First, let me assure you that the beans don't absorb all of that salt. *Fine Cooking*'s recipe testers used the amount of salt I specified through several rounds of testing, and the beans were delicious every time, never too salty. That said, you can certainly use any amount of salt you wish.

But to answer your question: The reason I use ¼ cup salt is mainly because I cook a relatively small amount of beans in a copious amount of water (4 quarts); less salt just wouldn't add the amount of flavor I desire. The large amount of water is important because it ensures that the beans cook evenly and also helps them retain their bright green color. During cooking, green beans release acids into the water, which can cause their color to change from brilliant green to olive-gray. By using more water, the acidity is diluted so the beans stay nice and bright.

What, no *Holiday Baking*?

I have just realized that I am not going to get a *Fine Cooking Holiday Baking* issue this year. I can't tell you how disappointed—and frustrated—I am by this. The holiday baking issue has always been the highlight of the year. As a Canadian, I have to say that getting a *Fine Cooking* with half of the content dedicated to cooking turkey every November is getting a bit tedious. So I'm feeling doubly frustrated: more and more Thanksgiving but no holiday baking? Why? I love this magazine but this imbalance is making me grumpy.

—Allison Tom, via email

Editors' reply: We certainly didn't mean to make you grumpy. We understand your frustration with Thanksgiving. We've cooked a lot of turkeys, too, though we know there are plenty of new cooks every year who haven't. That's why we made a special effort this year to ensure that nearly all of our Thanksgiving content did double duty. In other words, we included recipes that were seasonally appealing and practical for lots of different kinds of cooking, not just that one holiday. And we tried to have something for everyone; even our turkey feature included a delicious roast chicken and a stuffed turkey breast as alternatives to the big bird.

We also understand your disappointment about the *Holiday Baking* issue. But when we turned that issue into a regular, seasonal issue of *Fine Cooking* (to deliver more of the mix of different types of recipes and techniques that readers ask for), we made a conscious decision to devote a lot of space to baking. The holiday dessert party menu, the shortbread bar cookie story, and the cookie foldout deliver 22 baking recipes. So we thought we had met readers' needs for the season pretty well, but we realize it's not the same as an all-baking issue.

We want to make sure you know that you can now find more great baking recipes, tips, techniques, videos, and articles on our redesigned Web site. If you visit our homepage, www.finecooking.com, you'll see special features called "On the Front Burner." Many of these rich collections are dedicated to baking—from cookies to apple desserts to chocolate—and each has the kind of detailed recipes and in-depth information you're used to finding in the magazine. ◆

fine Cooking

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The Taunton Press, 63 S. Main St., P.O. Box 5506,
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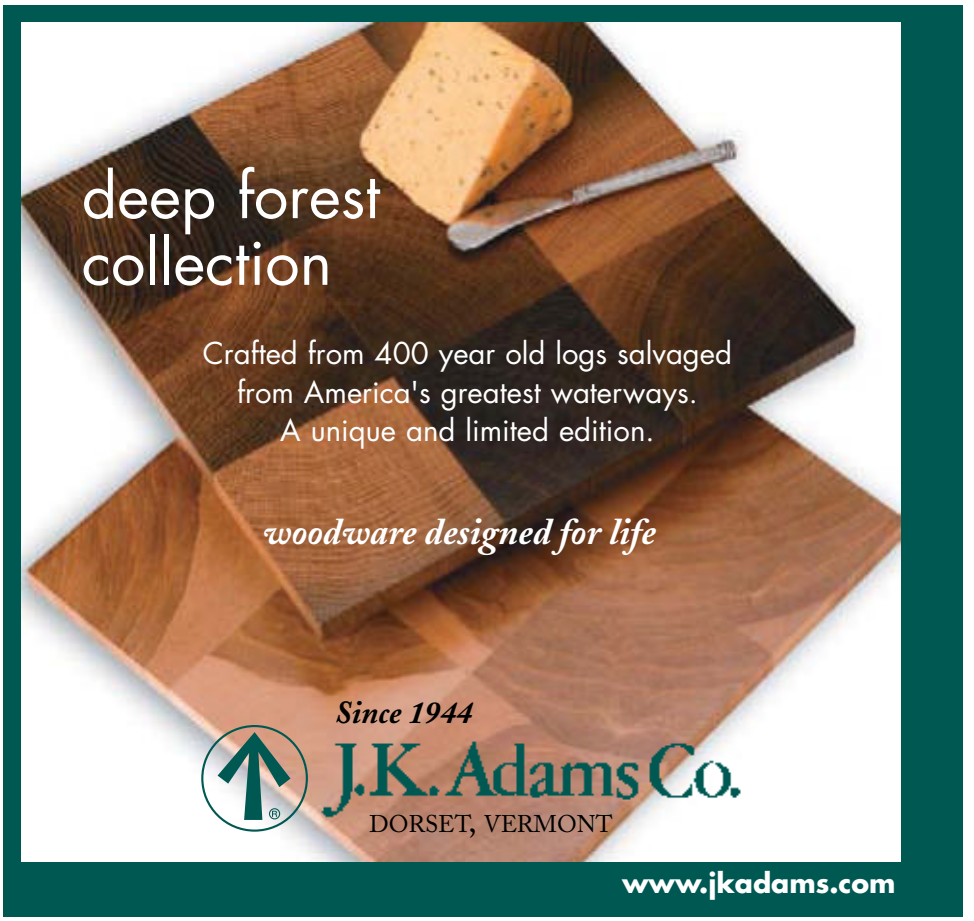
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Photos: Scott Phillips

My local market is selling "organic" salmon. Is there such a thing?

—Celia LePage, Kensington, California

A Valerie Craig responds: There is such a thing as organic salmon. The biggest producers are based in Scotland, Canada, Ireland, and Chile, and the fish you saw at your local market is probably from one of these countries. Quite a few other countries are also raising organic salmon, though the United States is not yet one of them (by definition, organic salmon is farmed, not wild). While the standards for organic salmon vary somewhat among countries, there are some common elements, including the following:

- Hormones, antibiotics, or appetite stimulants cannot be used.
- The feed must meet certain requirements. Vegetable and grain feed must be organic; where fish is the feed, regulations vary, from requiring 100% fish trimmings (in other words, no additives) to using fish from sustainable fisheries.
- The number of fish per unit area (called stocking density) is lower for organic salmon than for conventionally farmed salmon.

The USDA has not yet created its own set of standards for organic salmon, or for organic fish in general, but a task force is working on it. Over the next couple of years, as these standards are developed, you can expect organic-salmon producers to appear in North America and as a result, you will see more organic salmon at your local fish market.

Valerie Craig is a representative at the Seafood Choices Alliance, a trade association for the sustainable seafood industry.

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to fcqa@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

I'm in the market for a wine decanter, but I'm not sure what qualities make a good one. What should I look for?

—Augustus Samson, New York City

A Tim Gaiser responds: Decanters are used to aerate wine. They range in price from $15 to more than $100, but you can find a good, all-purpose decanter for between $25 and $50 that will serve you well for years.

Decanters can take a variety of shapes, from simple carafes, to bottle shapes, to those with wider bases. I'd suggest avoiding ones with overly wide bases and lips, as it's difficult to pour all of the wine from them without spilling. Also, look for decanters made of clear glass without any decorative etching, which can detract from the appearance of the wine. And though some decanters come with glass stoppers, you shouldn't store any wine in the decanter long enough to need a stopper.

Tim Gaiser is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking *and a master sommelier.*

Why do some pot roast recipes tell you to place a sheet of parchment under the lid of the Dutch oven?

—Lisa Lyons, via email

A Molly Stevens responds: Placing a sheet of parchment under the lid of a Dutch oven while cooking pot roast (or any other braise) serves three purposes:

First, the parchment tightens the seal between the pot and the lid, filling any gap that may occur between the two. This helps trap moisture in the pot, so whatever you're cooking will stay juicy.

Second, the parchment lessens the headroom in the pot (I crumple and push the paper downward so it almost touches the top of the ingredients in the pot), which helps keep the roast enveloped in moisture. In braising, there's an endless cycle of evaporation of pan juices and condensation as the steam hits the underside of the lid, turns back into liquid, and drips back into the pot, basting the food as it cooks. By adding the paper, you allow less space between the meat and the lid, intensifying this cycle.

Finally, the parchment helps baste the braise more evenly. The lids of most braising pots are dome shaped, which causes much of the condensation to drip down the sides of the pot, missing the food in the center. A sheet of parchment can create a flat or even convex ceiling so the condensation concentrates toward the center, allowing the drips from the condensed steam to baste the food more directly.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, *is the author of* All About Braising. ◆

contributors



Andrea Reusing



Kimberly Masibay



Gale Gand

In this issue, contributing editor Molly Stevens ("Bistro Cooking at Home," p. 33) shares her favorite bistro recipes—simple but satisfying dishes that taste authentically French. Molly has written and edited several books, including *All About Braising,* winner of both a James Beard award and an International Association of Culinary Professionals award. When she's not writing and developing new recipes, Molly is traveling around the country giving cooking classes; she won the IACP Cooking Teacher of the Year award in 2006. Classically trained as a chef in France, Molly has taught at the French Culinary Institute, New England Culinary Institute, and l'Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne in France and Italy.

Ris Lacoste ("Rice Pilaf," p. 40) has been a professional chef for nearly 25 years. She worked at several Massachusetts and D.C. restaurants, finally landing at 1789 Restaurant in Georgetown, where she was executive chef for 10 years. She recently left 1789 to open her own restaurant.

Fine Cooking senior editor Kimberly Masibay ("Crème Brûlée," p. 45) says, "I used to work as a pastry chef, so everyone who comes to dinner at my house expects an amazing dessert. Crème brûlée is my secret weapon. It's super easy and it never fails to impress, particularly if you fire up the blowtorch and caramelize the sugar at the table." Kim trained as a pastry chef in Germany and went to culinary school in Chicago.

In this issue, our tireless contributing editor Tony Rosenfeld ("Crispy Chicken," p. 48) lets us in on his clever technique for making crisp-coated chicken without the muss and fuss of deep frying. Between his numerous projects for *Fine Cooking,* Tony somehow finds the time to watch over his growing restaurant empire in Boston. He also just finished writing his first cookbook, *150 Things to Make with Roast Chicken,* to be published by The Taunton Press this spring.

At her pan-Asian restaurant, Lantern, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Andrea Reusing ("Asian Vegetables," p. 53) offers authentic Asian food using seasonal, local ingredients. Andrea started her cooking career in New York City and moved to North Carolina in 1996. There, she ran a catering company and then became the chef at Enoteca Vin in Raleigh. She left in 2001 to open Lantern.

Fine Cooking's test kitchen associate and food stylist, Allison Ehri ("Quick-Braised Fish," p. 58), is a big fan of fish, which she cooks in every possible way. But come winter, her favorite method is to braise it in the oven in a flavorful sauce. "Braising fish preserves the integrity of its moist, tender flesh and its clean, delicate flavor," she says. In this story she shares three of her favorite braised fish recipes. Before joining the staff of *Fine Cooking,* Allison worked as a freelance recipe tester, developer, and writer for several food magazines.

Gale Gand ("Playful Desserts," p. 62) is well known for her creative desserts and humorous plays on classic American sweets. Gale is the executive pastry chef and partner at four restaurants in Chicago, including Tru and Gale's Coffee Bar. She's also the host of the Food Network's *Sweet Dreams* and has written six cookbooks, including *Gale Gand's Short + Sweet* and her latest, *Chocolate*

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in season



In the garden

Parsnips need a loose, deeply worked, fertile soil and a full season of growth to come to maturity. As with carrots, sow the seed directly in the garden in spring and keep it moist until it sprouts, which may take up to three weeks. Late in the fall, cut the tops back, leaving just enough to see where the plants are, and begin harvesting. The flavor will improve as the weather gets colder and frosts convert some of the parsnips' starch to sugar.

Sweet & Peppery Parsnips

by Ruth Lively

While eating at a restaurant not so long ago, my order of lamb came with a delicious parsnip and apple gratin. The waiter told me that only recently had the chef been bold enough to describe it accurately on the menu. Before, he'd called it a "turnip and apple gratin," because he worried that parsnips might scare people off. (The idea that turnips might have more appeal than parsnips amused me a little.) In another dish, parsnips were snuck in as "white carrots."

I think the lowly parsnip deserves better than that. Yes, parsnips do look like overgrown white carrots (they're related to carrots, after all), but their flavor is more complex. They're wonderfully sweet like carrots—maybe more so—but they're also rich, earthy, faintly peppery, and a little nutty, too. It's an acquired taste for some, but to me, it's one worth having. I also love parsnips' versatility. They're good roasted or sautéed, braised, and even puréed for soups and mashes—and they make great side dishes with rich, wintery meat courses, such as braised short ribs, lamb shanks, pot roasts, and roasted duck.

Parsnips come into season in fall but are at their best smack in the middle of winter. They're sold either loose or in 1-pound plastic bags. Either way, look for roots that are firm and heavy for their size. Size itself doesn't matter, but larger parsnips often have a tough, fibrous core, which should be removed, at least from the thick upper half of the root. Store parsnips in a loosely closed plastic bag (don't tie it; you want some air to circulate) in the crisper drawer of the fridge. They'll keep for several weeks.

Parsnips are especially good with fruits and vegetables harvested in the same season, such as apples and pears, as well as with potatoes, carrots, turnips, and beets. Sometimes I play up their natural sweetness with brown sugar, maple syrup, or apple cider; other times, I add a counterpoint with a good sherry, cider, or wine vinegar. Balsamic works well, too, lending flavors both sour and sweet.

prepping tips

Simply trim away the tops and bottoms and peel them, just as you would with carrots. Parsnips have a core that can be tough and fibrous, especially in the thick upper part of the root. It's best to cut out that inner core.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Roasted Parsnips with Cinnamon & Coriander

Serves four.

The cooking method and the spices play up parsnips' sweetness, counterbalanced by last-minute additions of lemon juice and chopped fresh cilantro, which add brightness. If cilantro isn't to your liking, use parsley.

1½ lb. parsnips (about 10 medium)
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. sweet paprika (or a mix of mostly sweet and some hot)
½ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Peel the parsnips and cut each into 1-inch pieces crosswise, then cut the thicker pieces into halves or quarters to get chunks of roughly equal size. (Don't try to match the skinny tail-end pieces.) If the core seems tough or pithy, cut it out. You'll have about 4 cups.

Arrange the parsnips in a single layer in a 9x13-inch baking dish. Drizzle with the olive oil and toss to coat evenly. Combine the cumin, coriander, paprika, salt, and cinnamon in a small bowl and stir to mix. Sprinkle the spices evenly over the parsnips and toss until the parsnips are well coated.

Roast until completely tender and lightly browned on the edges, 35 to 45 minutes, stirring once or twice during cooking. Sprinkle with the cilantro and lemon juice and toss well. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary before serving.



3 ways to cook parsnips

Parsnips are so versatile they can be cooked almost any way you want. Here are some quick ideas for mashing, roasting, and braising.

Mashed or puréed

I usually start with boiled parsnips, but roasted parsnips are also delicious for these mashes and purées.

Mash boiled parsnips with cream, milk, and butter. Season with salt and pepper and a spoonful or two of sherry or Madeira. Transfer to a shallow baking dish, scatter chopped walnuts or pecans over the top, if you like, and bake until lightly browned on top.

Purée boiled parsnips and carrots with a bit of cream, season with salt and a little white pepper, and stir in some finely chopped crystallized ginger.

For a twist on applesauce, boil and mash together parsnips and tart apples. Add butter, freshly grated nutmeg, and a little lemon juice and zest. Serve with roast chicken, turkey, duck, or goose.

Roasted

Typically, I reach for olive oil when I'm roasting vegetables, parsnips included. (Follow general time and temperature guidelines in the recipe above.) You can roast them halved, cut into matchsticks, or in chunks, as in the braises at right.

Toss a blend of parsnips and carrots in olive oil, salt, and pepper and roast until tender and lightly caramelized. Stir in some cilantro pesto.

For a colorful mélange, toss parsnips, turnips, beets, and sweet potatoes with oil and season with salt, pepper, and a little cayenne. Roast until almost tender. Stir in lots of chopped parsley, some minced garlic, and lemon zest and finish roasting.

Toss the parsnips in oil, salt, and pepper and roast them with whole shallots until almost tender. Drizzle with a blend of maple syrup and fresh orange juice, toss with some chopped rosemary, and finish roasting.

Braised

When braising, I like to cut parsnips crosswise into 1-inch pieces; then I cut the thicker pieces in halves or quarters to get chunks of roughly equal size. I start by browning the pieces in a fat—I like butter, but olive or vegetable oil works well, too.

As the parsnips brown, season with a healthy sprinkle of chopped fresh sage. Then simmer in apple cider until the parsnips are tender and the cider boils away to a brown glaze.

Brown the parsnips, season with salt and pepper, toss in a few thyme sprigs, and braise in chicken broth until tender.

Combine parsnips with 2-inch chunks of leek and brown. Add salt and pepper, deglaze the pan with white wine or dry vermouth, and let it boil away. Add a little water, cover, and cook until tender.

Ruth Lively cooks, writes, and gardens in New Haven, Connecticut. ◆

Wine Lingo, Demystified

BY TIM GAISER

So you're shopping at your favorite wine shop, trying to pick out a good bottle for dinner. As you amble down the aisles, you pause to read a rave review taped to the shelf by some well-meaning shop clerk, and you suddenly realize you don't understand half of what you're reading. Well, take comfort: You're not alone.

Wine is potentially a very complex subject—and the language we wine geeks use probably just adds to the confusion—but it becomes a lot less intimidating once you're familiar with the basic jargon. Here's a glossary of many commonly used wine terms with easy-to-understand definitions.

Wine label jargon

You'll frequently encounter these terms on a wine label or when reading about wine. They don't describe a wine's taste, per se, but offer details about the wine's origin and the way it was made, both of which affect the quality and character of the wine.

Appellation tells you where the grapes were grown and the wine produced. The appellation is especially important in French wines that are known by place names and rarely list grape varieties.

Cru is a French term denoting a vineyard or estate of exceptional merit. The concept of cru is especially important for Burgundy and Champagne, where the best vineyards are labeled premier cru and grand cru.

Cuvée means blend; a wine labeled "cuvée" is a blend of many different base wines, which may themselves be blends.

Estate-bottled wines come from grapes grown on a winery's own vineyards.

Meritage is a marketing term developed to describe California Cabernet Sauvignon blends that are modeled after the great reds of Bordeaux.

Reserve is the most abused term in the world of wine. Theoretically, it should be used by a winemaker only to designate his best product, but you'll see the term slapped on the labels of cheap, mass-produced wines.

Barrels & bottles

Barrel- or stainless-steel-fermented are the winemaker's two fermentation options. The choice depends on the style of wine and the specific grape variety. Stainless-steel-fermented wines emphasize bright, youthful fruit; barrel-fermented wines offer rich, creamy aromas and flavors.

Barrel- or bottle-aged tells you whether wine is aged in oak barrels or in the bottle. Oak-aging adds aromas or flavors of vanilla, baking spices, and toast to the wine. Bottle-aging (also called bottle-maturation) implies aging in a cellar, which should increase the complexity of the wine and make it smoother.

Varietal wines are made from a single grape variety and bear the grape's name on the label. To bear a varietal name, such as Merlot, Riesling, or Chardonnay, on the label, the wine must contain at least 75% of that grape, according to United States law.

Vintage denotes the year the grapes were harvested and the wine made. Most wines state a vintage year on the label, but there are also nonvintage (NV) wines, which are blends of wines from several years.

Tasting terms

These words are used to describe how wine tastes. Understanding them will help you make sense of the descriptions you read in reviews and wine-buying guides. They'll also help you evaluate the wines you drink by giving you specific aspects to focus on and words to describe what you taste.

Acidity refers to the tartness of a wine. A wine can be described as crisp or soft, depending on the amount of acidity. High-acidity wines might be described as crisp or racy, while those with low acidity are called soft, and wines too little acidity are often described as flat. In addition to balancing and enlivening wine's flavor, acidity is a key element in successful food-and-wine pairing. Generally, the most food-friendly wines have moderate alcohol balanced by crisp acidity.

Alcohol refers to the amount of alcohol in a wine, which for table wines usually ranges between 13% and 15%. The amount of alcohol determines a wine's richness, body, and to a great extent, the intensity of flavor. Wines with low alcohol feel light-bodied, while wines with too much alcohol often taste overripe and imbalanced.

Balance describes the harmony (or lack thereof) among all the elements in a wine. A balanced wine is a seamless progression of fruit, acids, alcohol, and tannins, with nothing too prominent.

Body describes how weighty a wine feels in the mouth. Wines that feel heavy and rich are full-bodied (the word "big" is often used to describe these types of wines). Feathery wines with little weight are light-bodied. Medium-bodied wines fall in between.

Complexity refers to the aromas and flavors in a wine and how they interact with each other. The more layers of flavor and aroma, the more complex the wine and the higher its quality.

Corkiness, the most common flaw in wine, is caused by a tainted cork. Corked wines smell and taste of wet, musty, or mildewed cardboard.

Finish describes a wine's aftertaste, be it fruit, acidity, oak, or tannins. Generally, the longer the flavor lasts after you swallow, the better quality the wine. However, there are also bad wines with regrettably long finishes.

Legs (or tears) are the trickles of wine that run down the inside of a glass after you swirl it. The legs are clues to how much alcohol or residual sugar the wine contains; thicker, slower legs indicate a wine with more alcohol or residual sugar.

Malolactic fermentation is a process by which some of the sharp malic acid in a young wine is converted to softer, smoother lactic acids. The process also causes the wine to develop a buttery flavor compound, which you'll find in many Chardonnays.

Sweetness or **dryness** levels refer to the presence or lack of sugar in wine. Wines range from bone dry, with no residual sugar, all the way to dessert sweet in style. Off-dry wines have just a hint of sweetness. Most table wines are dry to off-dry.

Tannins, which come from the skins, seeds, and stems of the grapes and also from the barrels, are usually found in red wine. Tannins taste bitter and make your palate feel fuzzy, velvety, puckery, or even dry if there's a good deal of tannin. Wines high in tannins are often described as firm or chewy, and those without a lot of tannins are called soft or supple.

Texture refers to a wine's mouth-feel. The texture of a wine may be described as silky or astringent or dense.

Name that style

Brawny/muscular wines are big, robust reds with lots of tannins.

Earthy describes a wine whose aromas and flavors are either minerally or evocative of rich soil. European wines tend to be earthier than their New World counterparts. Earthy wines are often described as having a sense of terroir (pronounced teh-RWAHR), a French term that refers to the specific region or vineyard where the wine was made. A sense of terroir lends complexity and interest to any wine.

Fruit-forward wines are dominated by the flavors of fresh fruit—berries, apples, cherries, and so on.

Jammy wines taste of very ripe, almost overripe berries. Zinfandels are often described as "jammy."

Oaky wines have a toasty, vanilla flavor that comes from aging in oak barrels. It can be wonderful, but too much oak can throw a wine out of balance.

Contributing editor Tim Gaiser is a master sommelier and wine educator. ◆

equipment



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BY KIMBERLY Y. MASIBAY

what's new

update

A better laser thermometer

When we first tried Bonjour's handheld laser thermometer (see *Fine Cooking* #74), we didn't find it particularly useful because it couldn't take a roast's internal temperature and help you gauge its doneness; it could read only surface temperatures. Well, Bonjour has improved the design. Its new model has a retractable stainless-steel probe that you can insert into food for an instant digital temperature reading. And it still has the infrared thermometer for quickly checking the surface temperatures of pans, ovens, grills, and whatnot.

The Bonjour Chef's Laser Probe Combo is $89.95 at SurLaTable.com.

A new and improved blender



KitchenAid's new five-speed blender may have an ultra-light polycarbonate pitcher, but there's nothing else lightweight about this machine. Sure, it can blend tomato sauces and purée vegetable soups with ease, but what's most impressive is how well it pulverizes the tough stuff: ice cubes, frozen fruit, nuts, chunks of Parmigiano. Whenever I made pesto or thick smoothies in my old blender, I would have to reach in several times to prod the ingredients into the blades. With this blender that wasn't necessary.

The two keys to its success seem to be the powerful motor and the roomy 56-ounce pitcher, which has a wide base and a contoured design that funnels ingredients toward the blade for fast and thorough blending.

The KitchenAid five-speed blender comes in white, red, cinnamon, chrome, and black. It sells for $99.95 at Cooking.com.

Edge-lovers, rejoice

When this unusual baking pan, designed for edge-lovers by 31-year-old inventor Matt Griffin, arrived in the mail, I couldn't help wondering, Does anyone really need this? Shortly thereafter, at a brownie tasting in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen, I noticed several *FC* staffers vying for the chewy edge pieces and suddenly I understood that, yes, some people really do need the Baker's Edge pan.



When I tried this heavy-duty cast-aluminum pan, I discovered at least three good reasons to like it:

- **Chewy edges on every piece.** The pan's patented design guarantees that every piece will have at least two chewy edges.
- **Even cooking.** The maze-like interior of the pan conducts heat efficiently, so whatever you bake in it cooks more evenly than it does in a rectangular pan.
- **No recipe adaptation required.** I baked a few batches of bar cookies, and it seems that recipes created for 9x13-inch pans will work in this pan, too, though the baking time may be a bit shorter or longer.

The Baker's Edge pan sells for $32.50 at BakersEdge.com.

Photos: Scott Phillips, except faucet, courtesy of the manufacturer

Nonstick cookware needs TLC

Nonstick sauté pans and skillets can take the anxiety—and the mess—out of cooking eggs, fish, and other prone-to-sticking foods, but if you want that nonstick coating to last, you need to treat it right. Since many of our recipes call for a nonstick pan, here's a little refresher in nonstick maintenance:

1. Don't let it get too hot. High heat (500°F+) weakens nonstick coatings, so never blast the heat as you might with a cast-iron or stainless-steel skillet. It's all right to heat an empty pan on medium heat for a couple of minutes before adding your ingredients—to make sure the pan isn't overheating, put a little oil or butter in it; if the fat smokes, the pan is getting too hot—but wait until the pan is full of food before increasing the heat to medium high.

2. Avoid nonstick cooking spray. In addition to ruining the nonstick coating, overheating can cause cooking oil to form a hard film on the pan's surface. This difficult-to-remove film causes pans to stop releasing food well. Because nonstick cooking spray goes on in such a thin layer, it can overheat very quickly, forming an invisible layer of this pesky film.

3. Clean it gently but well. Nonstick pans make cleanup a breeze, but don't take it too easy when you're washing up. Use hot soapy water, a sponge, and a bit of elbow grease to remove any cooked-on oils. If you use a scouring pad, make sure it's safe for nonstick surfaces.

4. Use the right utensils. When it comes to the enemies of nonstick coatings, utensil abrasion is right up there with high heat. Avoid metal utensils; use wood or silicone instead.

instant classic

No more mangled mangos



We've tried all sorts of gadgets for slicing, splitting, and coring fresh fruit, but generally we don't consider them essential—a knife is really the only tool we need. Mangos, however, are different. Trying to remove the pit can feel like a guessing game, and separating the oddly shaped thing from the clutches of the fruit is a sticky, slippery, and sometimes precarious procedure. That's why we were thrilled to discover Oxo's ingenious mango splitter. This is one gadget we'll take over a knife any day. Just set a mango on end and press down on the splitter. In one quick motion, the sharp blades slice the fruit down the middle, cleanly excising the pit from the two succulent halves of fruit.

You can buy the Oxo Mango Splitter for $11.99 at Oxo.com.



test drive

Hands-free faucet



If you've ever handled raw chicken and then struggled to turn on the tap without contaminating the faucet, the EZ Faucet by iTouchless offers a solution. It's an infrared adapter that lets you convert any standard faucet into a touch-free tap without breaking the bank or calling the plumber.

I attached the adapter to my kitchen faucet (all by myself) and used it happily for several months. I was especially impressed with the unit's responsiveness. Whenever I held my hands under the tap, the water instantly flowed; when I moved my hands away, the water stopped. No water wasted and no worries about spreading germs all over the faucet's handle. And when I wanted to let the water run for an extended length of time to fill a stockpot or my dogs' bowl, I simply pressed a button on the front of the unit to override the automatic feature.

As much as I loved the convenience of the EZ Faucet, there was one cosmetic matter I wasn't crazy about: the faux-chrome plastic housing, which felt a little chintzy. But, considering the product's reasonable price, this is a minor quibble. What matters most is that the faucet performed reliably day after day in my busy kitchen.

The EZ Faucet, which unfortunately doesn't fit onto spray-head faucets, runs on four AAA batteries, which the manufacturer claims will last for up to 18 months. You can order the EZ Faucet for $59.95 at Itouchless.com.

review

Garlic Presses

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL



When there's garlic to be minced, many cooks reach for their garlic presses. Some cooks like the convenience—with just a squeeze of the handle, a single clove of garlic (or more) is reduced to a fine mash. Other cooks use presses because they want to avoid getting the pungent smell of garlic on their hands. Yet, after working with 18 different presses for a day, we found only three that really offered both advantages.

Plenty of garlic presses have obvious failings—poor leverage, shoddy hinges, uncomfortable grip, or chambers that are too cramped to fit a whole garlic clove—but after crushing clove after clove and interviewing a number of garlic press users and nonusers, we discovered that the most pervasive problem seemed to be cleanup. Nobody likes to dig mashed garlic out of a space slightly larger than a thimble. The pronged cleaning attachments that come with (or are built into) some presses help marginally. And pressing a clove unpeeled minimizes the mess to some extent. But either way, there's still stuff to scrape out, be it with the tip of a finger, a paring knife, or a toothpick. Now what's convenient about that?

In an attempt to solve this problem, a number of brands have begun making presses with removable sieves that are meant to be easier to clean. In some of these presses the sieves look like tiny, removable rectangular baskets. It's an improvement, but these presses aren't perfect: Cleaning them still requires a bit of digging, and then there's the risk of misplacing the loose parts. Our winners, the Kuhn Rikon and Rösle presses, took another approach. These have flat sieves that swing out on a hinge, making them refreshingly easy to swipe clean without the risk of lost parts. This innovation might cost you more than you'd expect to spend on a garlic press, but if you use one often, you'll appreciate the time and trouble saved when it comes to the real dirty work—cleaning.



Winners

Kuhn Rikon Epicurean garlic press

$34.95 at Hugthecook.com

We like that the roomy stainless-steel sieve on this press is a hinged plate that swings up for simple cleaning with a sponge. An interior thumb rest holds the sieve in place when you open the press to load with garlic. The arched handles offer real ergonomic advantages and are friendly to small hands; you just have to be careful not to pinch your skin as the handles meet. The only disadvantage to this clever design is that a small amount of pressed garlic can seep around the sides of the chamber. Kuhn Rikon makes another "easy-clean" model with a scraper on the face of the sieve, but we like this one better.

How we tested

For this review, we crushed garlic—small, medium, and large cloves, peeled and unpeeled—through 18 models of garlic presses. These were the other brands we tested: Amco, Anolon, Chantal, Cuisinart, Dalla Piazza, KitchenAid, Leifheit, Messermeister, MIU France, Pedrini, Progressive International, RSVP Z-Gadgets, Wüsthof, and Zyliss.



Rösle garlic press

$34.95 at Cutleryandmore.com

Very similar in design to the Kuhn Rikon press, this sturdy model is strong and has nice balance. The handles provide good leverage once you begin to crush the clove, but if you have small hands, you may have to use both of them to get started because the handles are spaced far apart. Once shut, the brushed stainless-steel handles stay agreeably in place for storage. As with the Kuhn Rikon model, pressed garlic can seep around the edges of the chamber.

Minced vs. pressed:

Can you taste a difference?

Garlic presses aren't for everyone. Some cooks find it simpler to mince garlic with a knife; others argue that pressed garlic has inferior flavor. We've long wondered whether minced and pressed garlic actually taste any different. So to find out, we held a blind taste test, serving two versions of a quick marinara, sautéed Swiss chard, and gremolata (a garnish of minced garlic, lemon zest, and parsley). For each dish, we made one batch with minced garlic and one with garlic crushed in a press. Almost everyone found that garlic crushed in a press gave dishes a more aggressive garlic flavor. Many tasters found the pungency offensive in the gremolata, which featured raw garlic, but acceptable in the marinara, which was cooked.

Runner-up



Oxo i-Series garlic press

$16.95 at Lascosascooking.com

This garlic press is strong, comfortable to grip, and innovative. A small handle cleverly tucked inside the lower handle makes it easy to lift out the sieve plate for cleaning. The garlic chamber isn't as long as Rösle's or Kuhn Rikon's, but it's plenty deep, and the sieve plate fits snugly in place, so pressed garlic doesn't seep out. The plate, however, is thick, and some garlic does get stuck in the tapered holes; although the sieve mostly rinsed clean, we resorted to a toothpick to poke out those last few specks.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's *editor at large.*

trend alert

Incredible Shrinking Appliances

In the world of major appliances, bigger isn't necessarily better, particularly if you're trying to outfit a small kitchen with top-of-the-line gear or you're putting in a second appliance for ancillary use. Well, here's good news: It seems top appliance manufacturers are becoming increasingly space conscious, as they've launched an array of high-performance models with diminutive dimensions. Here's a sampling of several noteworthy space-savers.

Liebherr 24-inch Premium no-frost refrigerator (CS1350)



German refrigerator manufacturer Liebherr is a newcomer to the American market, and this tall, narrow fridge (80 inches high by 24 inches wide by 25 inches deep) is but one of its space- and energy-efficient designs. In fact, this model is the most energy-efficient bottom-freezer refrigerator on the market. It features stainless-steel construction, dual silent compressors that allow independent control of the fridge section and the frost-free freezer. The retail price is about $2,800. To find dealers near you, visit LiebherrAppliances.com.

Bosch Integra 800 Series 18-inch dishwasher (SRV53C03UC)



This compact 18-inch built-in dishwasher is big on features: five wash cycles plus power scrub, glass, quick, economy, enviro, and many other settings. And the stainless steel interior is roomier than you might think; it has two adjustable racks, can handle 24 place settings, and has a special spray tower for extra-tall items. Expect to pay about $1,100. For more information visit BoschAppliances.com.

Danby Silhouette 27-bottle wine cooler (DWC276BLS)



Danby's svelte under-the-counter wine cooler is just 12 inches wide by 34 inches tall, so it can squeeze into even the smallest undercounter space. But it has the capacity to store 27 wine bottles. The suggested retail price is $700. For more information visit Danby.com.



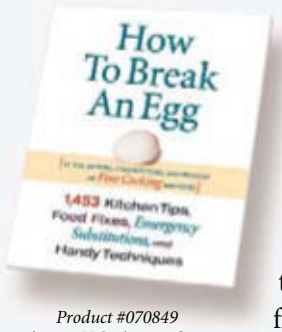
24-inch Aga Companion

This 24-inch-wide dual-fuel range is meant to be a companion to a larger Aga range, but there's no reason why it couldn't be your one and only. It boasts four high-power gas burners, two electric ovens (one conventional oven with a broiler and one convection oven), and the classic Aga design. Made of cast iron and available in 15 appealing colors, it retails for about $4,350. For dealers visit www.Aga-Ranges.com.

Other manufacturers are also making small-scale appliances. Visit their Web sites for information: DelonghiMajorAppliances.com; FiveStarRange.com; Gaggenau-usa.com; Miele.com; SummitAppliance.com; VikingRange.com.

Photos: courtesy of the manufacturers

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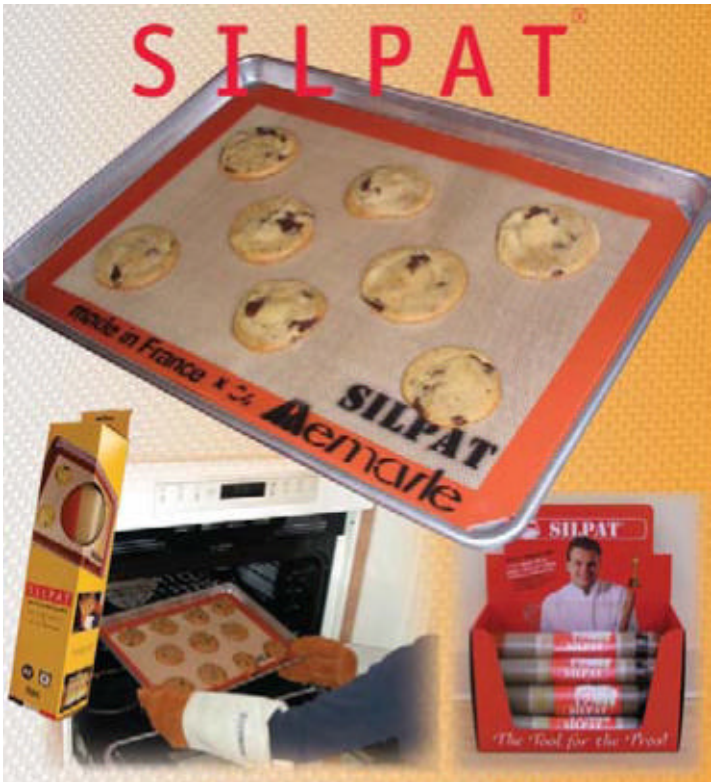
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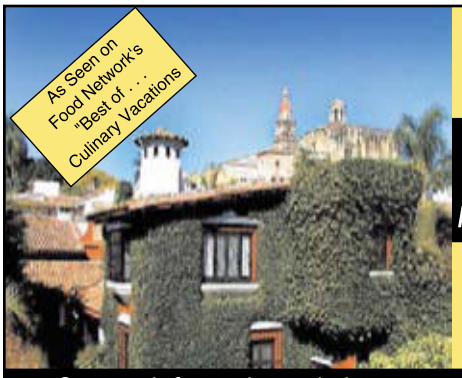
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readers' tips



Winning tip

Use box wine for cooking

I used to buy regular bottles of wine for cooking, but I often couldn't use it all before it went bad. Now I use box wine instead. The airtight bag inside the box keeps oxygen out, so the wine lasts longer, and the spigot makes it easy to measure the amount I need. There are several good-quality box wines now, most of which are moderately priced.

—Linda Simmerson, Sanford, North Carolina

A little oil helps reopen bottles with sticky contents

Bottles with sticky contents, such as corn syrup, honey, and maple syrup, can be hard to open. So after I open the bottle the first time, I coat the threads lightly with oil. The oil keeps the cap from sticking and makes it a breeze to unscrew the next time. You might have to re-coat the threads every so often.

—Erica Little, via email

A cheese knife makes a clean cut on cheesecakes

I was recently slicing a cheesecake using the laborious technique of heating a knife under hot water and wiping it dry after every slice or two. It occurred to me to try my cheese knife, which has holes meant to prevent cheese from sticking. It made clean cuts and did not require any wiping between slices.

—Jennifer Goldbeck, Cedarburg, Wisconsin

Use sticky notes for shopping lists at the ready

When I decide to cook a recipe from a magazine, I write a list of all the ingredients on a sticky note. I stick the note onto my grocery list, putting a pencil mark next to the ingredients I need, and do the shopping. Then I use it as a bookmark in the magazine. The next time I want to make that recipe, I already have a shopping list prepared.

—Wilma Cobrs, Kingston, Ontario

A prize for the best tip

We want your best tips—we'll pay for the ones we publish—and we'll give a prize to the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fctips@taunton.com.

The prize for this issue's winner: A Norton IM200 professional knife sharpener with how-to DVD; value, about $100.





Improvise a cake platter with cardboard and foil

When I bake a cake to bring to a friend's house, I want to be able to leave without bothering the host to claim my cake platter. So I create one from cardboard and foil. While the cake is cooling on the rack, I invert a platter that fits the cake size onto a piece of cardboard—usually cut from a box—and trace a circle around it. Then I cut out the cardboard circle and wrap it in foil to get a perfectly functional "silver" platter for my cake.

—Irene Ong, Madison, Wisconsin

Photos: Scott Phillips



A slotted spatula removes ramekins from a water bath

I always found it tricky to remove crème brûlée ramekins from a hot-water bath. I've tried tongs, with little success. Then I bought a flat, slotted spatula, which works like a charm. I just slide it under each ramekin, allow the water to drain, and transfer the ramekin to my work surface. It's easy and safe.

—Mary Vierra, Grants Pass, Oregon

TOO GOOD TO FORGET
from *Fine Cooking* #11

Pinning down parchment

When I cut parchment from a roll, it curls up and slips around as I try to line a baking sheet with it. To prevent this from happening, I clip the parchment to the rim of the baking sheet with a spring-loaded clothespin at each corner. As soon as the item to be baked is safely on the baking sheet, whether it's a batch of cookies or a couple of loaves of bread, the item itself will hold the paper down, and the clothespins can be removed before putting the baking sheet in the oven.

—James Hunter, Traverse City, Michigan

Marbles warn when boiling water is too low

I'm prone to burning pots when steaming vegetables because I let the water completely evaporate. To prevent this, I place four or five glass marbles on the bottom of my stainless-steel pot. Then I add water, bring it to a boil, and steam my vegetables. When the water is low, the marbles start moving around on the bottom of the pot, making a racket, which tells me that I need to add more hot water.

—Susan Bedsole, via email



Wrap a bottle to catch the drips

Before I open a new bottle of oil, I fold a paper towel around the middle of the bottle and secure it with tape or an elastic band. The towel keeps the oil from running down the sides of the bottle, so my countertops stay clean, as do my hands. You may have to change the paper towel as it deteriorates with use.

—Marilyn Quon, San Diego, California



Use a wire twist-tie to truss chicken legs

I often find myself without butcher's twine when I need to truss chicken or turkey legs before roasting. As an alternative, I use those large paper-covered wire twist-ties used to wrap lettuce and other produce in grocery stores. I save these twist-ties, rinse them to remove any dirt, and stash them in a drawer, ready to use. I throw them away after I've roasted the chicken or turkey.

—Mary Ann Palchikoff, Fairbanks, Alaska

Mix flavored butter in a plastic bag

When making flavored (or compound) butter, instead of mixing the softened butter with the other ingredients in a bowl, I put all the ingredients in a zip-top bag, seal it tightly, and knead until well mixed. Then I lay the bag on a work surface and gently push the butter toward the bottom with a dough scraper or the back of a knife. I snip off a corner of the bag and pipe the butter onto a piece of parchment to form a log, which I wrap and store in the fridge. I find this method neater and easier, and there's no bowl to wash.

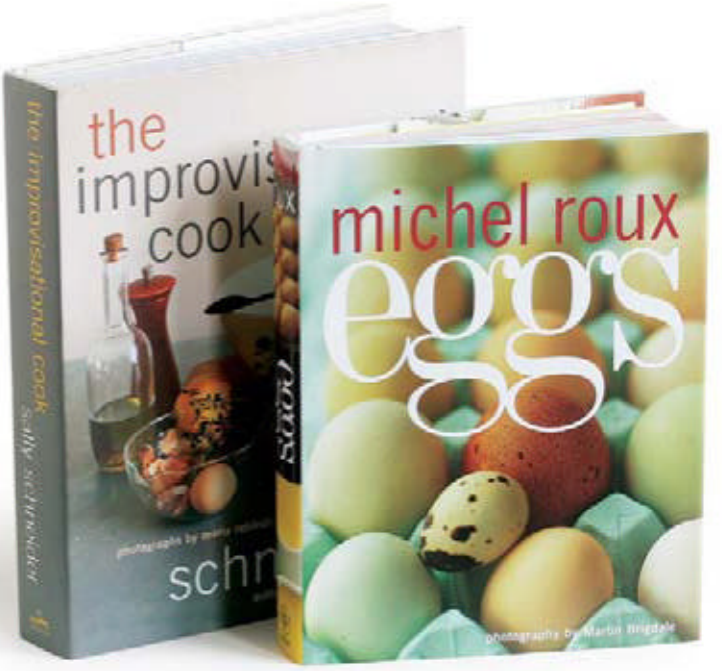
—Eileen Godfrey, Simi Valley, California ◆

book reviews

Cozy Up with a New Cookbook

Winter is a wonderful time to retreat to the kitchen and cook up something delicious. Whether you want to delve into uncharted culinary territory or stick to the classics, these new books will get you started.

BY LAURA GIANNATEMPO



Inspiration in the kitchen

If you like to take liberties with recipes and wander off on your own path, you'll love *The Improvisational Cook* (William Morrow, $34.95). And even if you're a strict recipe follower, author Sally Schneider will give you the confidence and know-how to be more creative: "Once you understand how a basic technique or recipe works, you can start to improvise on it," says Schneider. She believes that what keeps most people from improvising in the kitchen is their unfamiliarity with specific techniques and with the way ingredients interact. So for each recipe, Schneider provides an "Understanding" section, a sort of guide to improvisation where she explains the logic behind the recipe and gives practical ideas for making it your own. Then she gives four or five examples of her own "Improvisations," offering valuable insight into a cook's creative process.

The main recipes are divided into seven categories and range from flavored oils and caramelized onions to a Rustic Root Vegetable Soup, Crisp Pan-Fried Fish Fillets, and an Ever-Improvisational Meat Loaf. Her guide to classic flavor affinities and sections about understanding flavor combinations and the importance of seasoning are also useful improvisational tools. With this book at your side, you're bound to see recipes in a whole new light—as springboards for tasty dishes of your own creation.

Eggs (Wiley, $24.95) is chef Michel Roux's delightful homage to the genius of the egg—an often underappreciated (and sometimes downright maligned) component of so many recipes. Roux expertly guides us through various techniques of egg cooking, from boiled, scrambled, and fried eggs to making omelets, soufflés, and custards. He even includes chapters on fresh egg pasta and ice cream. And for each technique, he shares several tempting recipes—some traditional, others a bit more adventurous. With dishes ranging from Eggs Benedict and Ham and Eggs to Thai-Style Rolled Omelet, Scrambled Eggs Masala, and Vanilla and Mango Soufflé, there's something here for everyone.

I was particularly intrigued by the deep-fried egg technique—and a little skeptical, too. But when our test kitchen gave it a spin, we loved the results: The eggs were crispy on the outside and oozing with yolky richness inside. Graced with stunning photographs, including step-by-step technique shots, this beautiful little book manages to be both inspirational and very practical.

Photos: Scott Phillips



Across the oceans

In *Jamie's Italy* (Hyperion, $34.95), British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver takes on Italian cooking, inviting us on a whirlwind trip around the boot to explore the food of the "real" Italy, as he puts it, from antipasti to desserts. While in substance this book is not that different from other well-researched collections of traditional Italian recipes, Oliver's infectious energy and obvious passion for the food drew me in and sent me straight to the kitchen. Oliver's recipes are simple to follow, most can be made with easy-to-find ingredients, and the ones I've tried—including a delicious fennel risotto with ricotta and dried chiles—were quite tasty. His headnotes and introductory chapters also pack a lot of useful information, helping to put the recipes in context. And the book is a beauty to behold. It's filled with gorgeous, atmospheric photographs of inviting dishes as well as of Jamie Oliver himself roaming around the back streets of Italy, making pasta with Italian matrons, and sharing wine with craggy-faced shepherds (though I must admit that the photos seem a little contrived at times).

In so many ways, this is my kind of Italian cookbook: It's honest to the food yet fresh and inspiring. And it exudes charm right down to the intentional imprecision of the ingredient lists ("a pinch of ground fennel seeds" or "4 large handfuls of fresh basil"), which remind me of the way my Italian mother writes her own recipes.

Tabla, the acclaimed Indian-fusion restaurant in New York City, is easily one of my favorites in town. So as soon as I got a copy of chef Floyd Cardoz's first cookbook, *One Spice, Two Spice: American Food, Indian Flavors* (William Morrow, $34.95), I eagerly took it home and spent a glorious weekend in the kitchen cooking my way through a feast of Goan Spiced Crab Cakes and Avocado Salad, Lemon Chive Raita, and Shrimp Curry. Everything tasted amazing, almost as if it came straight from Tabla's kitchen, and his subtle use of spices translates surprisingly well in his recipes.

Cardoz's eclectic culinary background, which took him from Bombay and the island of Goa to France, and then New York City, makes for a distinctive and enticing collection. A useful introductory section offers valuable tips on buying and storing spices as well as on grinding and toasting them.

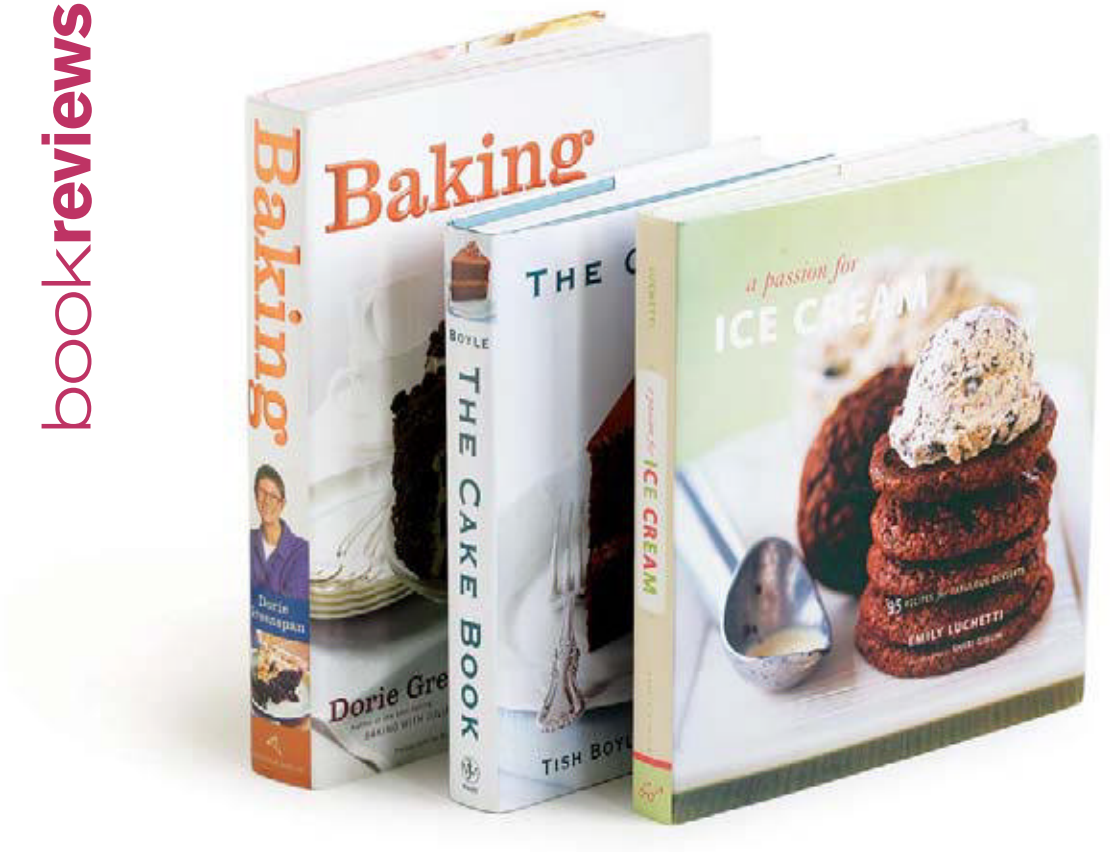
The recipes don't always feel accessible, though. Several call for ingredients that can be hard to come by, such as curry leaves and kokum (the fruit of the gamboge tree, impossible to find anywhere but at an Indian market), and others seem to belong strictly to a restaurant menu—I don't know many people who would tackle Black Spice-Rubbed Poussin with Kokum Jus at home. But the adventurous cook can learn a lot about how spices are used in Indian cuisine through Cardoz's unique interpretations.



A new *Joy*

America's most popular cookbook is back with a brand-new edition to celebrate 75 years of joyful cooking. ***The Best Loved and Brand New Joy of Cooking*** (Scribner, $30), released last November, replaces the controversial 1997 edition, which was accused by some of betraying the author's original quirky, first-person voice in favor of a more contemporary—and impersonal—approach. This new *Joy* is based largely on the beloved 1975 edition, and, indeed, such vintage recipes as Shrimp Wiggle and Quick Tuna Casserole are back (along with lots more that require opening a cream-of-something can). But while clearly bowing to nostalgia, this *Joy* sneaks in a few new sections that address more recent trends, like a grains cooking chart, a "cook for a day, eat for a week" section, and a list of 30-minute recipes.

—L.G.



For the dessert lover in all of us

Dorie Greenspan's *Baking, from My Home to Yours* (Houghton Mifflin, $40) is one of those books you know you must have as soon as you lay eyes on it. It's an attractive tome with lots of big photographs and yummy recipes that make you want to tie on an apron and get baking. And it's got weight, too. By that I don't just mean that it feels nice and heavy; it also has an impressive encyclopedic breadth. The book covers everything from muffins, scones, and other breakfast sweets to cookies, cakes, pies, tarts, and "spoon desserts" (puddings, custards, crisps, and ice creams). There's room in it for classics, such as Tarte Tatin, Pound Cake, and an All-American Apple Pie, as well as for more-unusual creations like Espresso Cheesecake Brownies and Fluted Polenta and Ricotta Cake. But Greenspan's tone is anything but academic. She gives recipes happy titles like Chocolate Chunkers and Cranberry Upside-Downer, and along the way, she serves up a wealth of baking pointers—from how to get perfect pie dough to instructions for frosting layer cakes—with an amiable, reassuring voice that makes you feel that you have a baker friend at your side.

Tish Boyle's lovely *The Cake Book* (Wiley, $39.95) contains everything you need to know about baking cakes, whether it's a straightforward, single-layer carrot cake or a complicated, multilayered, frosted, and decorated chocolate dacquoise. A thorough and easy-to-follow introductory section covers the basics: from flours and fats to sugars, eggs, stabilizers, and leaveners, as well as cake-baking equipment, tips, and techniques (like measuring ingredients and preparing pans). And the recipes I made delivered great results. I can vouch for Boyle's Devilishly Moist Chocolate Cake, which uses safflower oil instead of butter. Quick enough to bake on a weeknight, it was easy and absolutely delicious.

Another jewel of a book, Emily Luchetti's *A Passion for Ice Cream* (Chronicle Books, $35) makes you want to get a spoon and dig into one of her tempting frozen treats. Sure, you need to invest in an ice-cream maker (a requirement for most of the book's recipes), but once that's taken care of, you too can turn out meltingly soft, delicious creations like Dulce de Leche Frozen Yogurt, Lime Ice Cream, Tangerine Creamsicle Sodas, and Walnut Cookie and Caramel Ice-Cream Sandwiches. The recipes, which include sundaes, floats, sorbets, Popsicles, ice-cream cakes, and frozen desserts to eat with your fingers (think ice-cream sandwiches and bonbons) are all fun, imaginative, and totally doable. In addition, there are ideas for a variety of toppings and decorations. With this book at hand, you can easily say good-bye to the ice-cream man.

Laura Giannatempo is an assistant editor for Fine Cooking. ◆

Bistro Cooking at Home



Call up a few friends and settle in for a casual dinner of braised lamb shanks, rustic beef stew, or a saucy chicken sauté

BY MOLLY STEVENS

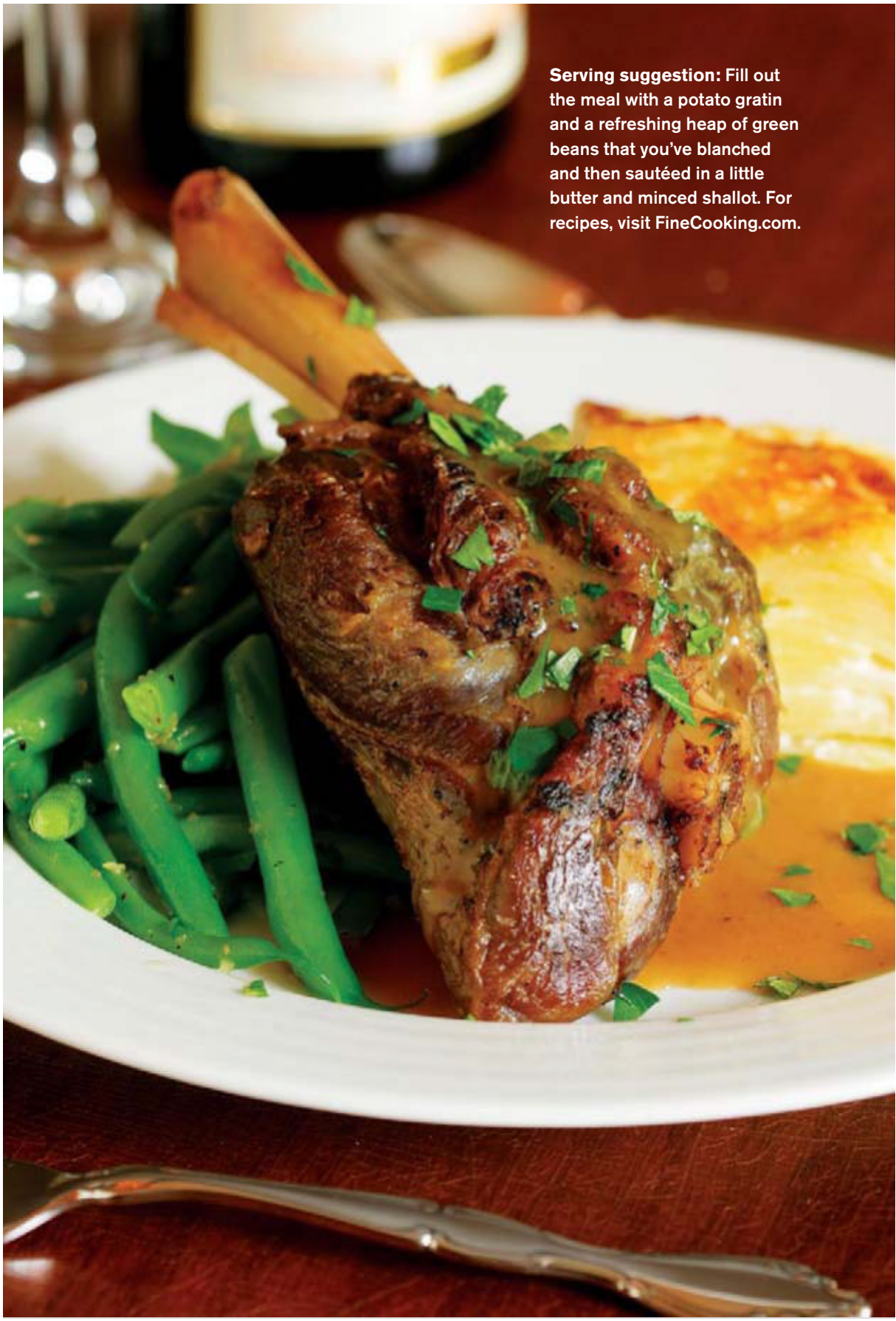
There's something about a real French bistro that makes you want to pull up a chair, tuck a napkin into your lap, and see what's on the menu. Warm and inviting, a bistro is the ultimate neighborhood restaurant, a place where, if you were lucky enough to live around the corner, you could happily eat three or four nights a week, even though the menu might offer nothing more than a few entrées, a couple of salads, and a

Braised Lamb Shanks

single house dessert. Bistro food is French home cooking at its best—simple but satisfying dishes, presented without fanfare or flourish, often lovingly prepared personally by the proprietor.

It would be impossible to name all the timeless classics that qualify as bistro fare—everything from steak frites and roast chicken to steamed mussels and braised rabbit—but three of my all-time favorites are braised lamb shanks, beef stew, and a chicken sauté with vinegar. These are the dishes I can't resist when I spot them on a menu, and since my visits to France aren't nearly frequent enough to satisfy my appetite for these wonderful meals, I've come up with my own versions. Like most bistro food, the recipes on these pages aren't fussy; and best of all, they taste really authentic. So next time you get a craving for that bistro atmosphere, here's what you do: Make one of these dishes, call up a few good friends, set a casual table, and put on an Edith Piaf or Jacques Brel CD, or just your favorite jazz music. And then enjoy the little French bistro you've created in the comfort of your own home.

Find more bistro recipes, tips, and cooking techniques, at finecooking.com



Serving suggestion: Fill out the meal with a potato gratin and a refreshing heap of green beans that you've blanched and then sautéed in a little butter and minced shallot. For recipes, visit FineCooking.com.

Photos: Scott Phillips

with Garlic & Vermouth

Souris aux Aulx

About the only place you'll see whole lamb shanks on a French menu is in a bistro. Perhaps the primitive appearance of the meaty shanks is considered too boorish for fine dining, I don't know. But what I do know is that nothing matches slow-cooked lamb shanks for tenderness and depth of flavor. The inspiration for my recipe comes from Richard Olney's *Simple French Food,* where the shanks and garlic are cooked with nothing more than a bit of water. I've updated Olney's version by adding dry white vermouth and a few bay leaves to give the braising liquid an elusive, herbaceous flavor that permeates the meat and intensifies the dish.

A few points: Lamb throws off a considerable amount of fat as it cooks, so be sure to take the time to thoroughly skim the sauce before serving. Better yet, braise the shanks a day or two before you plan to serve them, and store them and the braising liquid in the refrigerator. When it comes time to reheat and serve, simply lift the solidified fat from the surface of the sauce. The dish will have even more flavor after a day or two.

Braised Lamb Shanks with Garlic & Vermouth

Serves six.

6 lamb shanks (¾ to 1 lb. each)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup dry white vermouth, preferably Vya or Noilly Pratt
2 bay leaves
2 heads garlic, separated into cloves (unpeeled)
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice; more as needed
¼ cup chopped fresh herbs, preferably a mix of mint and parsley (chervil and chives are also good)

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. If necessary, trim any excess fat from the lamb shanks, but don't trim away the thin membrane that holds the meat to the bone. Season the shanks all over with salt and pepper.

Heat the oil over medium heat in a large Dutch oven or other heavy braising pot large enough to accommodate the lamb shanks in a snug single layer. When the oil is shimmering, add half the shanks and brown them on all sides, 12 to 15 minutes total. Set the browned shanks on a platter. Repeat with the remaining shanks. When all the shanks are browned, pour off and discard the fat from the pan.

Set the pan over medium-high heat and add the vermouth. As it boils, stir with a wooden spoon to dissolve any drippings. Return the shanks to the pan, arranging them as best you can so they fit snugly. Tuck the bay leaves in between the shanks and scatter the garlic over them. Cover and braise in the oven, turning the shanks every 45 minutes, until fork-tender, 1½ to 2 hours.

Transfer the shanks to a platter and cover with foil to keep warm. Tilt the braising pot to pool the juices at one end and skim off and discard any surface fat. Pour what remains in the pot into a medium-mesh sieve set over a bowl. Discard the bay leaves. With a rubber spatula, scrape over and press down on the garlic cloves so the pulp goes through but not the skins; be sure to scrape the pulp clinging to the bottom of the strainer into the sauce. Whisk in the lemon juice. Taste and add salt, pepper, and more lemon juice if needed. To serve, pour the sauce over the shanks and shower them with the chopped herbs and a little freshly ground pepper.

Make ahead note: The dish can be made up to three days ahead. After braising, transfer the shanks to a baking dish. Strain and season the sauce as directed in the recipe. Pour a little strained sauce over the shanks to moisten them. Refrigerate the shanks and the sauce separately, both tightly covered. Before serving, reheat the chilled sauce, pour it over the shanks in the baking dish, cover the dish with foil, and warm in a 325°F oven for about 30 minutes. Finish with the herbs and black pepper, and serve.



tip: After the long braise, the garlic cloves are tender enough to push through a sieve, creating a flavorful purée that thickens the pan sauce. Don't forget to scrape the pulp clinging to the bottom of the strainer.

drink choices

The lamb calls for a deeply flavored red wine with herbal notes. A Syrah from France's northern Rhône Valley, such as either the 2004 Cave de Chante-Perdrix St. Joseph (organic), $22, or the 2004 Jean Luc Columbo Crozes-Hermitage, $24, would be a good choice.

Chicken with Vinegar



Serving suggestion: Steam small red or white potatoes until tender. Just before serving, sauté the potatoes in butter until browned and crispy.

& Onions
Poulet au Vinaigre

In my experience, a poultry sauté is one of the most overlooked techniques in French cooking. It's easier than pan-frying and more elegant than a stew. A sauté refers to dredging a cut-up bird (usually a small chicken) in flour before cooking it in a deep skillet with either butter or olive oil and very little, if any, added liquid. As the chicken cooks, it simmers in its own juices mingled with the fat, creating a very concentrated, rich sauce. Most cooks add some aromatics (onions, leeks, or shallots) and a bit of wine or vinegar to balance the richness.

In my version, I first sauté the onion, turning it sweet and tender before adding it to the sautéed chicken. I also love the combination of tarragon and chicken, but if you're not a tarragon fan, you can substitute another delicate herb, such as parsley, chervil, or chives. I encourage you to try it with tarragon, though, because even those who are averse to the herb have told me they love it in this dish. I find that finishing the dish with a dab of crème fraîche brings all the flavors into focus.

Chicken with Vinegar & Onions

Serves four to six.

3 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 medium-small yellow onions, thinly sliced (about 2½ cups)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. Champagne vinegar (see Tasting Panel, p. 71, for recommendations)
1 4-lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces (or 2 bone-in, skin-on breasts and 4 bone-in, skin-on thighs)
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Gris
2 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon leaves
2 Tbs. crème fraîche (or heavy cream)

In a 12-inch skillet, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter over medium heat. Add the onions, sprinkle with a couple of big pinches of salt and a few grinds of pepper, and stir to coat the onions. Cover, reduce the heat to medium low, and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are tender and lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Scrape them into a small bowl and set the skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 Tbs. of the vinegar and stir with a wooden spoon to dissolve any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Pour the vinegar into the onions and set the skillet aside.

If using chicken parts, cut each breast crosswise into two equal-size portions and trim any excess fat or skin from the thighs. Rinse and pat dry.

Spread the flour in a pie plate, and season the chicken pieces with salt and pepper. Set the skillet over medium-high heat and add the olive oil and the remaining 1 Tbs. butter. While the butter melts, dredge half of the seasoned chicken pieces in the flour, shaking off the excess. Set them skin side down in the skillet. Brown, turning once, until the skin is crisp and the chicken is evenly browned, 6 to 8 minutes total. Lower the heat if the chicken or the drippings threaten to burn. Transfer the chicken pieces to a pan or platter and repeat with the remaining chicken.

When all the chicken is browned, pour off all of the fat. Return the skillet to medium-high heat, add the wine, and scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to dissolve the drippings. Add the remaining 2 Tbs. of vinegar, the sautéed onions, and 1 tsp. of the tarragon. Return the chicken pieces, skin side up, to the skillet, arranging them in a single snug layer. Partially cover, leaving a small gap for the steam to escape, and lower the heat to maintain a low simmer. Continue to simmer gently, turning every 10 minutes, until the chicken is tender and cooked through, about 30 minutes total.

Transfer the chicken to a platter. Increase the heat to a more rapid simmer, and stir in the crème fraîche (or cream); the sauce may appear broken at first, but it will come together. Taste for salt and pepper. Add the remaining 1 tsp. tarragon and spoon over the chicken to serve.

Make ahead note: This dish can be made a day or two ahead, but don't add the last teaspoon of tarragon. Reheat gently in a covered baking dish in a 325°F oven for about 30 minutes, adding a few tablespoons of water or chicken broth if the chicken appears dry. Sprinkle with the tarragon and serve.



tip: Leave the lid of the skillet slightly ajar to let some steam escape during cooking. This concentrates the liquid for a more intense sauce, and it also ensures that the liquid doesn't boil or simmer too hard, which would overcook the chicken.

drink choices

The vinegar and crème fraîche elements in this dish call for a racy white wine with herbal elements. Sauvignon Blanc is a great choice; look for wines from the Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé regions of France. The 2004 André Vatan Sancerre, $16, and the 2004 Henri Bourgeois Pouilly-Fumé, La Porte de l'Abbaye, $16, would be good bottles to try.

Beef Stew with Red



Serving suggestion: Mashed potatoes would be a perfect foil for the daube's rich wine sauce. For recipes, visit FineCooking.com. Or you could serve the daube with wide egg noodles tossed with butter and parsley.

Wine & Carrots
Daube de Boeuf aux Carottes

Very simply, a daube (pronounced dohb) is a red-wine-based beef or lamb stew. This type of dish has countless flavor permutations, of course, but the most famous (and my favorite) is the Provençal daube, seasoned with local herbs and a bit of orange zest. The orange was originally the bitter Seville orange, but you can make a fine daube with a few strips of navel orange (add a strip of lemon, too, if you want to sharpen the flavor). I also like to add some sort of vegetable garnish to sweeten and brighten the stew. Here I've used carrots cut into hefty chunks so they hold their shape during the long cooking, but you could also use a combination of parsnips, baby onions, and celeriac.

When buying meat for a daube, your best bet is to select a small chuck roast and cut it yourself. Most butchers and meat markets cut their stew meat way too small for my preference. In my mind, a proper daube should be a knife-and-fork affair—meaning the chunks are larger than bite size (see the photo tip at right).

Molly Stevens, an award-winning author and contributing editor to Fine Cooking, *got hooked on bistro fare while working at La Varenne cooking school in France.* ♦

Beef Stew with Red Wine & Carrots

Serves six.

1 3-lb. boneless beef chuck roast
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into ½-inch pieces
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
8 oz. shallots (8 to 10 medium), thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
2 Tbs. brandy, such as Cognac
2 Tbs. tomato paste
2 to 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped (2 to 3 tsp.)
2 tsp. herbes de Provence
2 cups hearty red wine, such as Côtes de Provence or Côtes du Rhône
1 14.5-oz. can whole, peeled tomatoes
4 strips orange zest (2½ inches long, removed with a vegetable peeler)
1 lb. slender carrots, peeled and cut into ¾- to 1-inch chunks (about 2 cups)
¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Using your fingers and a thin knife, pull the roast apart along its natural seams. Trim off any thick layers of fat. Carve the roast into 1½- to 2-inch cubes and arrange them on a paper-towel-lined tray to dry.

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven. Heat the oven to 325°F.

Heat the oil and bacon together in a 7- or 8-qt. Dutch oven over medium heat, stirring occasionally, just until the bacon is browned but not crisp, 5 to 6 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a small plate. Season about one-third of the beef with salt and pepper, and arrange the cubes in a sparse single layer in the pot to brown. Adjust the heat so the beef sizzles and browns but does not burn. Cook until all sides are a rich brown, a total of about 10 minutes. Transfer to a large plate or tray, and season and brown the remaining beef in 2 more batches.

When all the beef chunks are browned, pour off all but about 1 Tbs. of drippings, if necessary. Set the pot over medium-high heat, add the shallots, season with a large pinch of salt and several grinds of pepper, and sauté until they just begin to soften, about 1 minute. Add the brandy and let it boil away. Add the tomato paste, garlic, and herbes de Provence, stirring to incorporate, and sauté for another 1 minute. Add the wine, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to dislodge the caramelized drippings, and bring to a boil. Pour in the liquid from the tomatoes, holding the tomatoes back with your hand. Then one by one, crush the tomatoes with your hand over the pot and drop them in. Add the orange zest, and return the beef (along with accumulated juices) and bacon to the pot. Finally, add the carrots, bring to a simmer, cover, and slide into the oven.

Cook the stew, stirring every 45 minutes, until the meat is fork-tender (taste a piece; all trace of toughness should be gone), 2 to 3 hours. Before serving, skim off any surface fat (if there is any), taste for salt and pepper, and stir in the parsley.

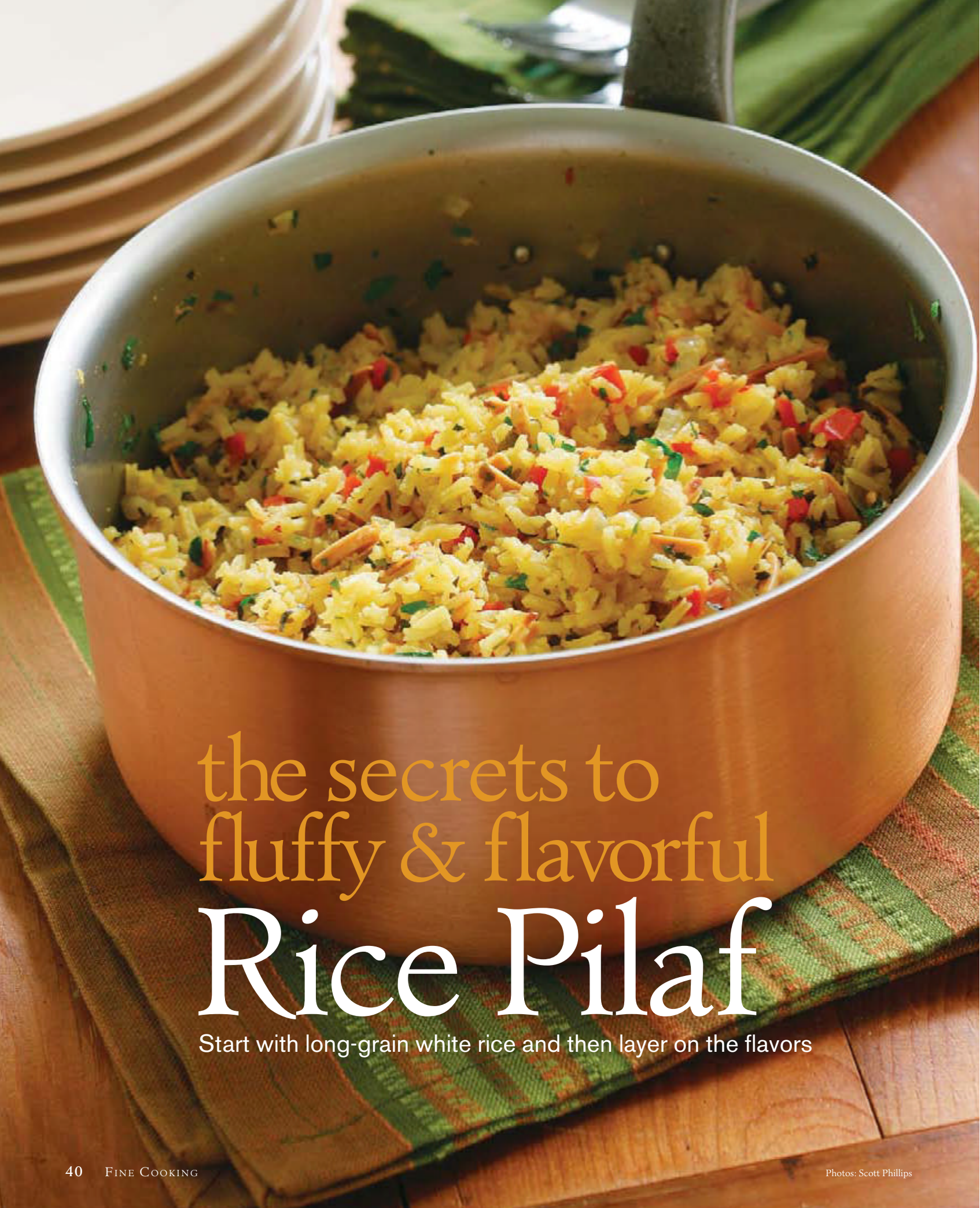
Make ahead note: This dish can be made up to three days ahead. Reserve the chopped parsley and don't bother skimming the surface fat. Instead, transfer the cooled stew to a bowl or baking dish, cover tightly, and refrigerate. Before reheating, lift off the layer of solid fat that will be on the surface. Reheat gently in a 325°F oven in a covered baking dish, stirring once, for about 30 minutes, or until hot. Taste for salt and pepper and add the parsley just before serving.



tip: Rather than buying already cut-up stew meat, buy a whole chuck roast and cut it into 1½- to 2-inch cubes. These larger chunks won't dry out during the long braise, and they make the stew more satisfying to eat. For more on chuck, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 66.

drink choices

This stew needs a rich, earthy red from the Old World, such as a Grenache blend from the southern Rhône Valley. Try the 2005 Mas Grand Plagniol "Tradition," Costières de Nîmes, $10, or the 2004 Château du Trignon, Gigondas, $18.



the secrets to fluffy & flavorful Rice Pilaf

Start with long-grain white rice and then layer on the flavors

Photos: Scott Phillips

BY RIS LACOSTE

When I make rice pilaf, I expect two things: light, fluffy texture—the individual grains of rice should be firm and separate, not mushy and stuck together—and bold, full flavors. Fortunately, it's easy to achieve both. The unique cooking process that gives pilaf its distinctive texture also provides several opportunities to incorporate flavor into the dish.

The pilaf method: toast, simmer, rest

The basic technique for making pilaf is pretty straightforward: The rice first toasts in fat, then simmers in liquid, and finally rests off the heat. I've found that at each step, there's a trick or two that will help deliver the fluffy texture I want. And there's also a chance to layer on flavor (see the sidebar on p. 42).

Toasting the rice briefly over medium-low heat in oil, butter, or another fat is key to getting dry, separate grains of rice. And the toasting process itself also gives the rice a subtle nutty flavor. During toasting, the grains shouldn't actually turn golden or brown. They will, however, lose their translucency, and the starches on the outside of each grain will firm up. As a result, the grains will absorb liquid slowly and thus maintain their shape as they cook. Toasting rice over medium-low heat also helps keep the starches from escaping from the grains, which could result in sticky rice.

Use a little less liquid than usual and simmer gently. Instead of using the standard 2:1 liquid to rice ratio, I use 1¾ cups liquid for every 1 cup of rice. This helps ensure a dry, separate texture. Once you add the liquid, stir the pot once and no more. Then let the rice simmer undisturbed for 18 minutes (rather than the typical 20 minutes). Again, the less the rice is agitated, the less chance there will be for starches to gum things up.

Finally, let the rice sit undisturbed off the heat with the cover on for 5 minutes. This allows the starch to firm up, which means the grains will be more likely to separate rather than stick when you fluff the rice and fold in your finishing touches.

Use the right rice

The pilaf technique will take you far toward getting good results, but to guarantee perfect texture, it's also important to use the right kind of rice. The best choice is long-grain white rice. The individual grains are long and slender, and they contain a type of starch that is more apt to let the grains stay separate and fluffy as they cook. (For more rice science, see p. 44.)

I usually use Carolina brand long-grain white rice; its mild flavor makes it perfect for all sorts of seasonings. But other long-grain varieties work, too. Basmati rice, for example, is an aromatic variety that's popular in India and Pakistan. It cooks up very dry, so it's wonderful for pilaf. Another long-grain variety is Thai jasmine rice, which is aromatic and a tad stickier than basmati. I recommend using the Carolina rice for the southwestern pilaf on p. 43 and the pilaf with sage, Parmigiano, and prosciutto on p. 44. Basmati rice would work deliciously in the pilaf with onions, orange & cherry on p. 42. And you could try jasmine rice in the saffron pilaf recipe at right.

Saffron Rice Pilaf with Red Pepper & Toasted Almonds

Serves six to eight.

The flavors in this pilaf remind me a little of paella. It's a great partner for salmon, shrimp, or mussels.

2½ cups low-salt chicken broth or water
Pinch saffron (about 20 threads)
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium onion, small diced (1¼ cups)
1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and small diced (about 1 cup)
1½ cups long-grain white rice
1 tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
Pinch ground cayenne
¼ cup roughly chopped fresh Italian parsley
1 large clove garlic, minced (1½ tsp.)
¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted
1 Tbs. roughly chopped fresh oregano

On the stovetop or in the microwave, heat the broth until hot. Add the saffron, cover, and let sit for 15 to 20 minutes.

In a heavy-based 3-qt. saucepan with a tight lid, heat the oil over medium heat. Reduce the heat to medium low and add the diced onion and bell pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until soft but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add the rice, salt, and cayenne, and stir well to coat each grain with oil. Toast for a full 5 minutes, stirring regularly to keep the grains separated and to prevent them from sticking to the bottom of the pan (the rice may turn opaque before 5 minutes is up, but keep going). Reduce the heat to low if there are any signs of scorching. Stir in 2 Tbs. of the parsley and the garlic.

Add the saffron broth, stir once, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 18 minutes. Remove from the heat, and let the pilaf sit, still covered, for 5 minutes.

Once the pilaf has rested, remove the lid and fluff the rice with a fork (see How to fluff pilaf, p. 43). Using the fork, gently fold in the almonds, the remaining 2 Tbs. parsley, and the oregano. Taste for seasoning and adjust as needed.



Rice Pilaf with Spiced Caramelized Onions, Orange, Cherry & Pistachio

Serves six to eight.

The flavors of this pilaf are wonderful with curries and with full-flavored fish like salmon.

4 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 medium onions: 2 sliced (about 3 cups); 1 small diced (about 1¼ cups)
½ tsp. ground allspice
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
Pinch ground cloves
1½ tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
Freshly ground black pepper
1 orange, zest finely grated (about 2½ tsp.) and juiced (about 6 Tbs.)
¾ cup sweetened dried tart cherries
1½ cups long-grain white rice
¾ cup shelled pistachios, toasted and roughly chopped (3.5 oz.)

In a 12-inch heavy-based skillet, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter over medium heat. Add the sliced onions, reduce the heat to medium low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly caramelized, 20 to 25 minutes. Add the allspice, cinnamon, and cloves, and stir well. Reduce the heat to low and cook another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, to allow the onion to absorb the flavors of the spices and caramelize a bit more. Season with ½ tsp. of the salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Set aside.

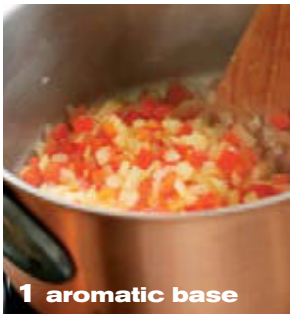
Pour the orange juice over the cherries in a small bowl to hydrate them, if necessary adding enough water to cover completely.

In a heavy-based 3-qt. saucepan with a tight lid, melt the remaining 2 Tbs. butter over medium heat. Reduce the heat to medium low and add the diced onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until soft but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and the remaining 1 tsp. salt and stir well to coat each grain with butter. Toast for a full 5 minutes, stirring regularly to keep the grains separated and to prevent them from sticking to the bottom of the pan (the rice may turn opaque before 5 minutes is up, but keep going). Reduce the heat to low if there are any signs of scorching.

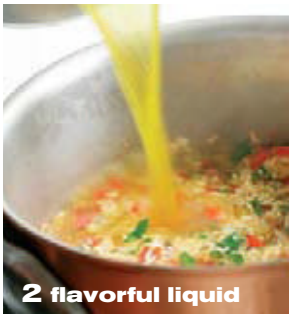
Add 2½ cups water, stir once, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 18 minutes. Remove from the heat, and let the pilaf sit, still covered, for 5 minutes.

Once the pilaf has rested, remove the lid and fluff the rice with a fork (see How to fluff pilaf, p. 43). Strain the cherries and discard the orange juice. Using the fork, gently fold in the cherries, caramelized onions, pistachios, and orange zest. Taste for seasoning and adjust as needed.

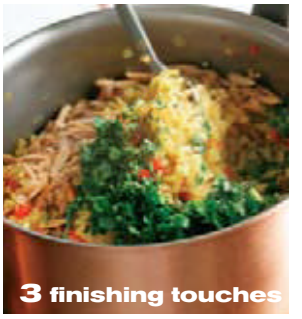
Building layers of flavor: 1, 2, 3



Creating a deeply flavored pilaf begins before you toast the rice. Choose a flavorful fat (for instance, olive oil, butter, or ghee), and then sauté your aromatic ingredients in it. Many delicious pilafs start with nothing more than onions and butter, but you can also add garlic, spices, herbs, and other finely chopped vegetables.



Building up the dish's flavor profile continues when you add the liquid. You might choose chicken broth instead of water, or use a bit of both with wine or a fruit juice. As the liquid boils down, it concentrates, infusing the pilaf with intense flavor.



Finally, when you fluff the rice before serving it, you can fold in ingredients that add textural interest as well as flavor. These final mix-ins might be uncooked ingredients, like fresh herbs, nuts, and cheeses, or precooked items like crispy bacon or caramelized onions.



How to fluff pilaf

Without a doubt, a fork is the best tool for fluffing rice pilaf. A spoon encourages clumping, but a fork's narrow tines gently separate the grains without breaking them, which helps preserve the perfect texture you've taken pains to achieve. Use a light hand, because vigorous stirring could break up the grains and encourage them to cling together.

Here's my fork-fluffing technique: Slip the tines down into the rice alongside the edge of the pan. Gently lift and toss the rice toward the center of the pan. Continue this process as you work your way around the perimeter. Then add your finishing-touch ingredients and gently fold them in with the fork, using a similar gentle fluffing motion.

Southwestern Rice Pilaf

Serves six to eight.

This dish makes a delicious accompaniment to steak or chicken fajitas.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium onion, medium diced (1½ cups)
1 medium poblano, stemmed, seeded, and finely diced (½ cup)
4 large cloves garlic, minced (2 Tbs.)
1½ tsp. chili powder
1 tsp. ground cumin
1½ cups long-grain white rice
1 tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
2½ cups low-salt chicken broth
1 14-oz. can diced tomatoes, drained well
1 lime
½ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
1 jalapeño, stemmed, seeded, and minced

In a heavy-based 3-qt. saucepan with a tight lid, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, poblano, and garlic, and reduce the heat to medium low. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the chili powder and cumin and cook, stirring frequently, until the onion is softened and the spices are very fragrant, about 3 minutes.

Add the rice and salt, and stir well to coat each grain with oil. Toast for a full 5 minutes, stirring regularly to keep the grains separated and to prevent them from sticking to the bottom of the pan (the rice may turn opaque before 5 minutes is up, but keep going). Reduce the heat to low if there are any signs of scorching.

Add the chicken broth and tomatoes, stir once, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 18 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the pilaf sit, still covered, for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, finely grate 1 Tbs. zest from the lime, and then cut the lime into wedges.

Once the pilaf has rested, remove the lid and fluff the rice with a fork (see How to fluff pilaf, above right). Using the fork, gently fold in the cilantro, jalapeño, and lime zest. Season to taste with salt. Serve with the lime wedges for spritzing over the rice.



Rice Pilaf with Sage, Parmigiano & Prosciutto

Serves six to eight.

I love to serve this with roast chicken, along with asparagus or fava beans.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
¼ lb. very thinly sliced prosciutto (about 5 slices), cut crosswise into 1-inch-wide strips
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 Tbs. chopped fresh sage
4 large cloves garlic, minced (2 Tbs.)
3 large shallots, thinly sliced (1 scant cup)
1½ cups long-grain white rice
1 tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
1 cup dry white wine
1½ cups low-salt chicken broth
2 oz. Parmigiano-Reggiano, coarsely grated on the large holes of a box grater (about ⅔ cup)

In a 3-qt. heavy-based saucepan with a tight lid, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Cook half the prosciutto in the hot oil, stirring occasionally, until browned and crispy, 1 to 2 minutes. With tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the prosciutto to a paper towel to drain. Repeat with the remaining prosciutto.

Add 2 Tbs. of the butter to the pan and reduce the heat to low. When the butter has melted, add 2 Tbs. of the sage and cook for a few seconds, and then add the garlic and shallots. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallots are soft but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and salt and stir well to coat each grain with oil. Toast for a full 5 minutes, stirring regularly to keep the grains separated and to prevent them from sticking to the bottom of the pan (the rice may turn opaque before 5 minutes is up, but keep going).

Add the wine, stir well, and cook over medium heat until the wine is mostly reduced, about 3 minutes. Add the chicken broth, stir once, and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 18 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let sit, still covered, for 5 minutes.

Once the pilaf has rested, remove the lid and fluff the rice with a fork (see How to fluff pilaf, p. 43). Cut the remaining 2 Tbs. butter into several pieces and, using the fork, gently fold it into the rice with the remaining 1 Tbs. sage, the Parmigiano, and the cooked prosciutto. Taste for seasoning and adjust as needed.

Award-winning chef Ris Lacoste was executive chef at 1789 Restaurant in Washington, D.C., for 10 years. She will be opening a restaurant of her own soon. ◆



tip: the fat adds extra flavor

In the recipe at left, I crisp prosciutto in olive oil before sautéing the aromatics and toasting the rice. The prosciutto's fat and flavor infuse the oil and everything that subsequently cooks in it.

Water is A-OK

As much as I love broth for pilafs, there's nothing wrong with cooking your rice in water. As long as you've added interesting ingredients during the sauté stage and a few flavorful finishing touches, a pilaf made with water will still be very tasty. In fact, water is my liquid of choice when I want the rice to retain its white color, as in the Rice Pilaf with Spiced Caramelized Onions, Orange & Cherry on p. 42.

food science

Why long grain?

There are many kinds of rice, but only long-grain white rice is perfect for pilaf. Why? Because of its starch content. Different rice varieties contain different kinds and amounts of starch, and starch content is what ultimately determines whether rice grains become fluffy or sticky as they cook. Long-grain rice is rich in a type of starch (called amylose) that is quite stable and doesn't get sticky during cooking, so the rice cooks up with firm, separate grains. Medium- and short-grain rice varieties, on the other hand, contain high amounts of a different type of starch (called amylopectin), which makes the rice grains become soft and sticky as they cook.

Crème Brûlée

These luxurious custards topped with crisp caramel are surprisingly simple to make

BY KIMBERLY Y. MASIBAY



Every cook needs a show-stopping, foolproof dessert in his or her arsenal. For me, that dessert is crème brûlée. It's rich, creamy, crispy, and sweet, and it's also amazingly easy to make (but that can be our secret).

The trick with crème brûlée, or any custard for that matter, is keeping the eggs in the mixture from overcooking and curdling. But honestly, it's not a big deal. My recipe, on the next page, has all the built-in safeguards, so you don't have to worry about a thing.

Temper the eggs and use a water bath

Crème brûlée is undeniably rich, but its texture should be light and silky, not thick and heavy and certainly not curdled. Achieving that silken texture is a simple matter of keeping the eggs from getting too hot at two key points in the recipe. First, when you're combining the hot (165°F) cream and the egg yolks for your custard base, you temper the egg yolks by whisking in a little bit of the cream to gently raise the yolks' temperature before stirring in the rest of the cream. And second, you bake the custards in a water bath.

A water bath insulates the custards from the direct heat of the oven and is your best insurance against overcooking and curdling. Direct heat can take a ramekin of custard from cooked to curdled in a minute, but since heat travels through water more slowly, you have a wider window of opportunity to catch the custards at the perfect degree of doneness.

A fiery finishing touch

Exquisite as the custard is, it's the caramelized sugar topping that makes crème brûlée special. Before the topping goes on, what you've got are humble-looking egg custards. But all that changes once you sprinkle on the sugar, fire up your blowtorch (see sidebar, p. 47), and melt the sugar into a thin, crisp caramel crust.

Although you can cook the custards a couple of days ahead and stash them in the fridge, it's best to wait until the last minute to give them their crowning glory or the topping will start to lose its crunch. After you caramelize the sugar, let the crème brûlée rest for a couple of minutes—just long enough for the caramel to cool and harden.

Making crème brûlée, step by step

Classic Crème Brûlée

Yields four 5-oz. custards; serves four.

One of the greatest things about this impressive dessert is that you can make the custards—minus the burnt-sugar topping—a couple of days ahead. Of course, you can eat them on the day you make them, too; just be sure to chill the custards for at least 3 hours before topping them with sugar.

1¾ cups heavy cream
1 vanilla bean or 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
4 large egg yolks (ideally cool or cold)
¼ cup plus 2 to 4 tsp. granulated sugar
Pinch kosher salt

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Fill a teakettle with water and bring to a boil. Put four 5- or 6-oz. ramekins (about 3 inches in diameter and 1¾ inches deep) in a baking dish that's at least as deep as the ramekins.

Mix it



Use a light hand when you whisk in the vanilla seeds so you don't whip air into the cream.



Strain the custard base into a large Pyrex measuring cup; the spout makes it easy to pour the custard into ramekins later.

1. Mix the custard base

Pour the cream into a small saucepan. If using a vanilla bean, cut it in half lengthwise with the tip of a paring knife and, with the back of the blade, scrape out the sticky, black seeds. Add the seeds and scraped pod halves to the cream. Whisk briefly to disperse the seeds (photo at left).

Bring the cream just to a simmer over medium heat. Remove the pan from the heat, cover, and let sit for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a medium mixing bowl lightly whisk the egg yolks, ¼ cup of the sugar, and a pinch of salt just to combine. Set aside.

With an instant-read or a candy thermometer, check the temperature of the cream; it should be no higher than 165°F. (If it is, let cool to 165°F before proceeding.)

Lightly whisk about ½ cup of the cream into the yolk mixture and stir for about 30 seconds; this tempers the yolks. Then gently whisk in the remaining cream, stirring for about 15 seconds to blend. Use a light hand—you don't want to make the mixture frothy or the baked custards will have a foamy-looking surface. If using vanilla extract, stir it in now.

Set a fine sieve over a large Pyrex measuring cup or a heatproof bowl with a spout. Pour the custard base through the sieve to strain out any solids (photo at left).

For variations, just infuse the cream with flavorings

Orange: Omit the vanilla bean and after the cream comes to a simmer, remove from the heat and immediately add 1 Tbs. Grand Marnier or Triple Sec, 2 tsp. (firmly packed) finely grated orange zest, and ½ tsp. vanilla extract. Cover and let sit for 10 minutes.

Ginger: Omit the vanilla bean (or extract), and instead add ½ Tbs. (firmly packed) finely grated fresh ginger to the cold cream before bringing it to a simmer.

Café au lait: Omit the vanilla bean (or extract), and right after the cream comes to a simmer, remove it from the heat and whisk in 1½ tsp. instant espresso powder (for sources, see p. 72) until dissolved. Cover and let sit for 10 minutes.

Earl Grey tea: Omit the vanilla bean (or extract), and after the cream comes to a simmer, remove from the heat and immediately add 5 tea bags (you may have to prod the bags with a spoon to submerge them). Cover and let sit for 10 minutes.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Bake it



2. Bake the custards

Divide the custard base evenly among the four ramekins in the baking pan. There should be a little more than an inch of custard in each ramekin; it should not come all the way to the rim. Slowly pour hot water from the teakettle into the baking pan (don't get any water in the ramekins) until the water comes about two-thirds of the way up the sides of the ramekins.

Carefully transfer the baking pan to the center of the oven, taking care not to slosh hot water onto yourself or into the ramekins. Lay a sheet of aluminum foil over the pan. Bake the custards until the edges are set about ⅓ inch in from the sides of the ramekins and the center is slightly jiggly (like Jell-O), 40 to 55 minutes. To test for doneness, reach into the oven with tongs and give one of the ramekins a gentle shake or nudge. If the custard responds with a wavelike motion rather than a slight jiggle, it's not firm enough; bake for another 5 minutes and check again. (If you're not sure about the doneness, stick an instant-read thermometer into the center of a custard—don't worry about making a hole; you'll cover it with sugar later—it should register 150° to 155°F.) The custards should not brown or rise.

Carefully remove the baking pan from the oven and take the ramekins out of the water bath using rubber-band-wrapped tongs or a slotted spatula (see the tip on p. 29). Let the ramekins cool on a rack at room temperature for 30 minutes and then transfer, uncovered, to the refrigerator to cool completely. Once the custards are refrigerator-cold, wrap each ramekin with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours or up to 2 days before proceeding.

Caramelize it



3. Caramelize the topping

Just before serving, remove the ramekins from the fridge and set them on a work surface. Working with one custard at a time, sprinkle ½ to 1 tsp. of the remaining sugar over each one—the more sugar, the thicker the crust. You may need to tilt and tap the ramekin to even out the layer of sugar. Wipe any sugar off the rim of the ramekin. Hold the torch flame 2 to 3 inches from the top of the custard and slowly glide it back and forth over the surface until the sugar melts and turns a deep golden brown. Allow the sugar to cool and harden for a few minutes, and then serve immediately, before the sugar softens and gets sticky.

Yes, you really do need a mini blowtorch

Homemade crème brûlée is just as good as and probably better than any you've had in a restaurant. But to get great results, you need the right tool: a mini blow torch (for sources, see p. 72). It really makes the difference between professional and pitiable results. A mini blowtorch isn't expensive, and it's fun to fire it up and finish off the crème brûlée while your guests look on. I've attempted to caramelize the sugar under the broiler, and although it can be done, I find the process annoying and the results disappointing—the custard tends to get warm, and its texture changes for the worse.



Kimberly Y. Masibay is senior editor for Fine Cooking. ◆

A New Take on

Bold flavors and extra-crunchy crumbs make this oven-crisped chicken the best you've ever had

BY TONY ROSENFELD

Like many of you, I love chicken breasts and cook them often, so often, in fact, that I run the risk of getting bored. So lately I've been thinking about ways to jazz up chicken breasts, and I think I've hit on something that will hold my interest for a good long time: crispy, crunchy coatings.

But don't worry: I'm not talking about fried chicken (which is great every now and then, especially when it's made in someone else's kitchen). Rather, with my method, you can bake the chicken in the oven but still enjoy all the crispness of deep-frying. And in the process, you also give the chicken breasts a great flavor boost.

Start with crisp crumbs, then slather on flavor

And now the million-dollar question: How do I get the crunchy crumb coating without frying? Here's my secret: The crumbs are crisp before the chicken even goes into the oven.

The first step in my method is making the crispy crumbs. I cook extra-coarse homemade breadcrumbs in oil in a skillet until they're browned and crunchy. Then, depending on the recipe, I'll boost the crumbs' crunch quotient by tossing them with another munchy ingredient like crumbled corn flakes or tortilla chips. And I might also mix in extra flavor with ingredients like fresh herbs, grated cheese, olives, or sun-dried tomatoes before pressing the mixture onto the chicken.

To get the crumbs to stick to the chicken, I forgo the traditional breading process: dipping the food into flour, then egg, then crumbs. Instead, I simply coat the breasts with a sticky, flavorful marinade, and then I pack on the crumbs. The marinade serves two purposes: One, it makes the chicken tasty. And two, the stickiness, which comes from ingredients like honey, yogurt, or marmalade, serves as the "glue" that binds the breadcrumbs to the chicken. If time allows, I suggest you let the chicken breasts sit or "marinate" in the sticky mixture for up to a day so the flavors really permeate the meat. But on busy weeknights, it's perfectly fine to slather on the flavor right before you coat and bake the chicken.

The result is anything but blah. And if my experience is any indication, once you start using this method, you won't have to worry about becoming bored with chicken for a long, long time.



Toasted Breadcrumbs

Yields about 2 cups.

These breadcrumbs form the base for the coating in the crispy chicken recipes on the following pages. If you want to cook up a batch in advance, see the sidebar on p. 51.

About ½ lb. fresh white bread, preferably a firm country loaf (to yield 4 cups coarse crumbs)
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil or melted unsalted butter
¼ tsp. kosher salt

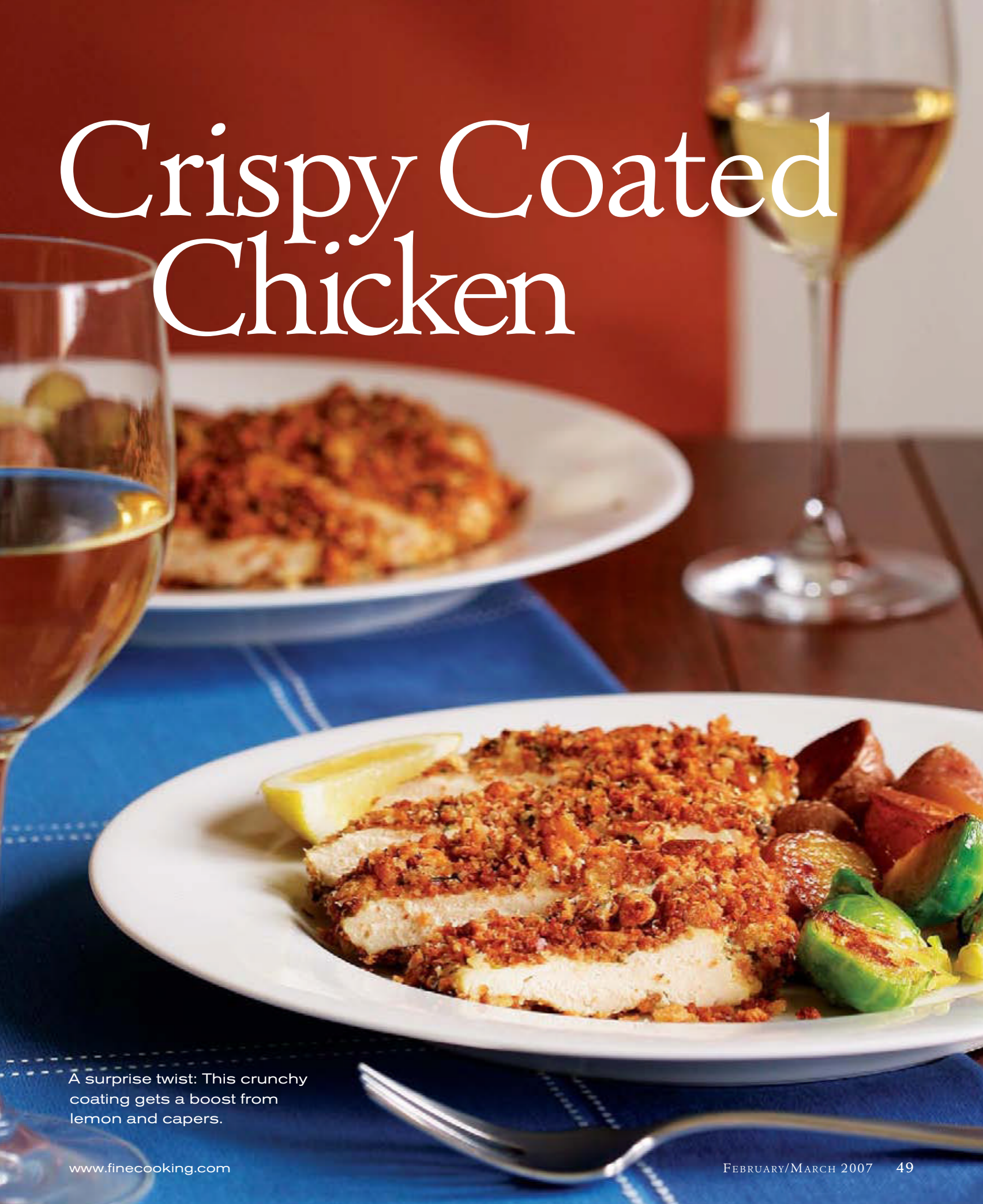
Tear or cut the bread into 1- to 2-inch pieces. Put a few handfuls into the bowl of a food processor (the bread shouldn't be crowded or squished), and pulse into coarse crumbs, including smaller pieces the size of oatmeal flakes and larger pieces about the size of small peas. Pour the crumbs into a large mixing bowl. Repeat until you have made 4 cups of breadcrumbs.

Toss the breadcrumbs with the olive oil or butter and the salt. Set a large (preferably 12-inch), heavy-based skillet (I use cast iron) over medium heat. Add the breadcrumbs and cook, stirring or tossing often—they should sizzle and make a steady popping noise—until they start to color and crisp, about 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low and continue to cook, stirring, until the crumbs dry out and crisp and have browned nicely, about 6 minutes.

Let cool and use in one of the recipes that follow. The crumbs will continue to crisp as they cool.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Crispy Coated Chicken



A surprise twist: This crunchy coating gets a boost from lemon and capers.

Crispy Chicken Breasts with Lemon & Capers

Serves four.

You'll need to make a double batch of breadcrumbs for this recipe. You might want to use two pans so you can make the two batches at the same time.

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (6 to 7 oz. each), trimmed of excess fat
¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
5 Tbs. capers (preferably nonpareils), rinsed, patted dry, and chopped
2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 lemon, zest finely grated, cut into wedges
½ tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
3½ cups Toasted Breadcrumbs (see recipe, p. 48)

Heat the oven to 450°F. Put a flat rack on a large rimmed baking sheet lined with foil.

With a meat pounder or a heavy skillet, lightly pound the chicken between two sheets of plastic wrap to even out the thickness of the breasts.

In a large bowl, mix ¼ cup of the Parmigiano, 2½ Tbs. of the capers, 1 Tbs. of the thyme, and the oil, mustard, lemon zest, salt, and pepper. Squeeze one or two of the lemon wedges to get 1 Tbs. juice and add to the mixture, along with 2 Tbs. water. Add the chicken and toss to coat well. You can proceed directly to coating the chicken breasts with crumbs, or let them marinate in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

Put the breadcrumbs in a large shallow dish and toss with the remaining ½ cup Parmigiano, 2½ Tbs. capers, and 1 Tbs. thyme. Working with one piece at a time, transfer the chicken to the dish of crumbs, scoop some crumbs on top, and press well a couple of times so the crumbs adhere to both sides. Transfer to the rack on the baking sheet.

Bake the chicken until it's firm to the touch and registers 165°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately with the remaining lemon wedges for squeezing over the chicken.

A 4-step method for crisp chicken from the oven



1. Pound just enough to even out the thickness so the chicken will cook evenly (don't make them too thin). If tenderloins are attached, remove, bread, and bake them with the breasts (they'll cook faster).



2. Flavor the chicken with sticky ingredients that will help the breadcrumbs adhere to the meat.



3. Coat with precooked crumbs that are already very crisp.



4. Bake in a hot oven until browned and cooked through.

Pack on the crumbs

These crumbs are coarser than your average breadcrumbs, so it takes a little extra force to get the crumbs to adhere. My method is to pat a healthy amount of breadcrumbs on top of the chicken and then use the heel of my hand and a firm rotating motion to press the crumbs onto the chicken. Don't shake off the excess when transferring the breasts to the baking sheet; you want to keep as many crumbs on the chicken as possible.



Definitely not your mother's breaded chicken: The lively Mexican flavors in this crispy coating make it a good match for a cold beer.

Crispy Cheddar & Jalapeño Coated Chicken Breasts

Serves four.

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (6 to 7 oz. each), trimmed of excess fat
1 cup plain yogurt, preferably whole-milk
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
1 Tbs. light brown sugar
2 tsp. chili powder
1 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 cups Toasted Breadcrumbs (see recipe, p. 48)
¼ lb. tortilla chips, crushed into coarse crumbs (about 1⅓ cups)
¼ lb. sharp Cheddar, grated (about 1 lightly packed cup)
½ to ⅔ cup sliced jarred jalapeños, chopped and patted dry
1 lime, cut into wedges

Heat the oven to 450°F. Put a flat rack on a large rimmed baking sheet lined with foil.

With a meat pounder or a heavy skillet, lightly pound the chicken between two sheets of plastic wrap to even out the thickness of the breasts.

In a large bowl, mix the yogurt with half of the thyme, the brown sugar, chili powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Add the chicken and toss to coat well. You can proceed directly to coating the chicken breasts with crumbs, or let them marinate in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

Put the breadcrumbs in a large shallow dish and toss with the tortilla chips, Cheddar, jalapeños, and the remaining thyme. Working with one piece at a time, transfer the chicken to the dish of crumbs, scoop some crumbs on top, and press well so the breadcrumbs adhere to both sides. Transfer to the rack on the baking sheet.

Bake the chicken until it's firm to the touch and registers 165°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately with the lime wedges for squeezing over the chicken.

Two ways to get a head start

Make the crumbs ahead. They'll keep for up to 3 days in an airtight container at room temperature. Or if you want to whip up a few batches of crumbs, you can store them in a zip-top bag in your freezer for a couple of months.

Marinate ahead. You can pound the chicken and immerse it in the sticky flavor bath the day before you plan to cook it. The results will be excellent because the flavors will really sink into the meat.

Crispy Orange-Sesame Chicken Breasts

Serves four.

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (6 to 7 oz. each), trimmed of excess fat
1 large navel orange
½ cup sweet orange marmalade
¼ cup honey
2 Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. canola or peanut oil
½ tsp. Asian sesame oil
1 tsp. Thai chile sauce (like Sriracha) or other hot sauce
½ tsp. kosher salt
2 cups Toasted Breadcrumbs (see recipe, p. 48)
½ cup sesame seeds, lightly toasted

Heat the oven to 450°F. Put a flat rack on a large rimmed baking sheet lined with foil.

With a meat pounder or a heavy skillet, lightly pound the chicken between two sheets of plastic wrap to even out the thickness of the breasts.

Using a rasp-style (Microplane) grater, grate the zest from the orange. With a serrated knife, cut 4 very thin slices from the center of the orange (save the rest of the orange for snacking or another use).

In a large bowl, combine the zest with the marmalade, honey, soy sauce, canola or peanut oil, sesame oil, chile or hot sauce, and salt. Add the chicken and toss to coat well. You can proceed directly to coating the chicken breasts with crumbs, or let them marinate in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

In a large shallow dish, toss the breadcrumbs with the sesame seeds. Working with one piece at a time, transfer the chicken to the dish of crumbs, scoop some crumbs on top, and press well a couple of times so the breadcrumbs adhere to both sides. Transfer to the rack on the baking sheet. Dip the orange slices in the leftover marmalade mixture to coat both sides and set on the rack.

Bake the chicken until it's firm to the touch and registers 165°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 20 minutes (the orange slices should be lightly browned). Serve immediately, topped with the orange slices.



Marmalade is the tangy binder for the delicious sesame coating on these breasts.



Add a crusty baguette and a bottle of Chianti for Friday dinner with friends.

Herbed Chicken Breasts with a Crispy Black Olive & Parmigiano Crust

Serves four.

The olives, Parmigiano, and sun-dried tomatoes give this crust a wonderful savory essence and a healthy dose of salt, too. For this reason, I decrease the amount of salt in the marinade. You can also omit the salt from the breadcrumbs recipe on p. 48 if you like.

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (6 to 7 oz. each), trimmed of excess fat
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. whole-grain mustard
4 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
½ tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 cups Toasted Breadcrumbs (see recipe, p. 48)
1 cup pitted Kalamata olives, rinsed, patted dry, and chopped
¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
3 Tbs. chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes (about 3 large tomato halves; pat dry before chopping)
1 lemon, cut into wedges

Heat the oven to 450°F. Put a flat rack on a large rimmed baking sheet lined with foil.

With a meat pounder or a heavy skillet, lightly pound the chicken between two sheets of plastic wrap to even out the thickness of the breasts.

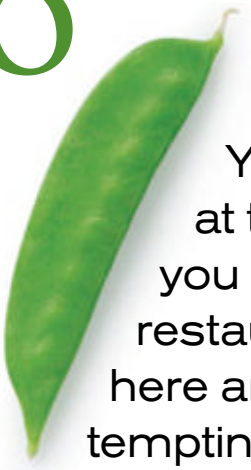
In a large bowl, mix the oil and mustard with half of the thyme, half of the rosemary, and the salt and pepper. Add the chicken and toss to coat well. You can proceed directly to coating the chicken breasts with crumbs, or let them marinate in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

Put the breadcrumbs in a large shallow dish and toss with the olives, Parmigiano, sun-dried tomatoes, and the remaining thyme and rosemary. Working with one piece at a time, transfer the chicken to the dish of crumbs, scoop some crumbs on top, and press well a couple of times so the crumbs adhere to both sides (these crumbs will be a little wet, so really press them on). Transfer to the rack on the baking sheet.

Bake the chicken until it's firm to the touch and registers 165°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately with the lemon wedges for squeezing over the chicken.

Tony Rosenfeld is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ◆

Getting to Know Asian Vegetables



You see them at the market, you eat them in restaurants—now here are some tempting ways to cook them

BY ANDREA REUSING



Snow peas, Japanese eggplant, napa cabbage, and bok choy are easy to cook once you know which flavorings and cooking methods best suit them.

Last year, several hours after a hurricane warning, a trip to the market revealed what people buy when confronted with the prospect of weathering several days without grocery shopping. The milk, bread, and eggs were nearly gone, as were the broccoli, carrots, and lettuces. There was even a hefty dent in the rutabagas. But the bok choys, napa cabbages, snow peas, and Japanese eggplant were nearly untouched. They lay in their neat bins, ready to endure the storm alone. And when I reached for a bunch of plump baby bok choy, I noticed a few curious looks. A couple of shoppers with dinner on their minds even asked me how I was going to prepare it.

It seems to me that while most home cooks have seen several varieties of Asian vegetables in grocery stores, they're often uncomfortable buying them because they're not sure how to cook them. But these lovely vegetables are actually very easy to cook, even with no special knowledge of Asian cuisines. It's just a matter of getting acquainted with their flavors and with the ingredients that enhance them, and finding the cooking methods that work best for each one. Generally, I prefer simple preparations that allow the vegetables' pure flavor to shine, as in the recipes that follow. Once you try them, I'm sure that you, too, will be inspired to add these often overlooked vegetables to your repertoire.



Bok choy (and baby bok choy) has a mild, sweet cabbagy flavor and a soft crunch. It has a gentle bitterness that stands up to strong, rich flavors.

Shopping & prepping

Look for tight, unwilted heads ranging from bright green to dark green, with no signs of yellowing or drying. Wash bok choy well. You can leave baby bok choy whole or cut it in half, but cut larger bok choy into pieces for stir-frying.

Flavor partners

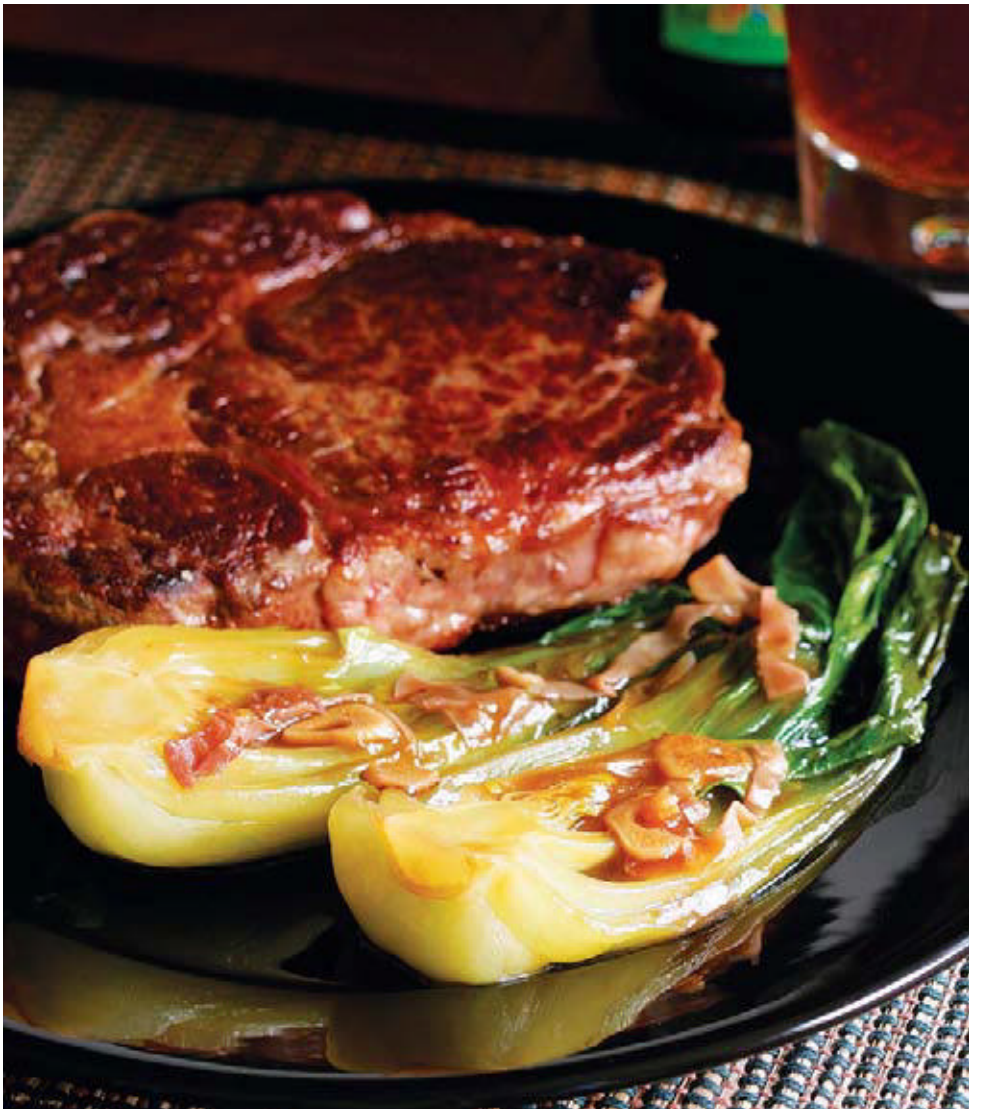
Bok choy harmonizes with assertive flavors like sesame, soy sauce, garlic, ginger, oyster sauce, chiles, and mushrooms.

Best cooking methods

Bok choy is excellent steamed, quick-braised, and stir-fried. Its chubby, spoon-shaped stalks capture sauces, making it a great last-minute addition to rich stews.

Ideas

My favorite way of cooking bok choy is to quickly sauté it in hot oil flavored with a little garlic or ginger and then briefly braise it in broth until just tender. I also like to add it to pork shoulder that's been slow-braised with soy sauce, a little sugar, and star anise.



Braised Bok Choy with Sherry & Prosciutto

Serves four to six as a side dish.

This is delicious with braised pork or beef short ribs, or simply with a pan-seared steak.

1 Tbs. vegetable oil
4 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced
6 heads baby bok choy (about 7 inches long and 2 inches in diameter at their widest), cut in half lengthwise
⅛ tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
¼ cup dry sherry (or Chinese rice wine)
½ cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth
1 Tbs. soy sauce
¼ tsp. granulated sugar
1 tsp. cornstarch mixed with 1 tsp. cold water to form a slurry
4 thin slices prosciutto, sliced crosswise into ¼-inch strips (⅓ to ½ cup)

Put the oil and garlic in a small wok or a deep, heavy-based, 10-inch, straight-sided sauté pan with a lid. Set over medium-high heat and cook, stirring frequently, until the garlic begins to sizzle steadily, about 1 minute. Add the bok choy (the pan will be crowded) and, using tongs, turn it in the oil and garlic, and then season it with the salt. When the tender tops begin to wilt, in about 1 minute, add the sherry (or rice wine) and toss again for about 15 seconds before adding the chicken broth, soy sauce, and sugar. Reduce the heat to medium, cover, and simmer until the bok choy tops are completely wilted and the stalks are crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer the bok choy to a plate.

Give the cornstarch slurry a stir to recombine and then whisk it into the cooking liquid. Simmer vigorously until the liquid has thickened, about 30 seconds. Remove from the heat and return the bok choy to the pan. Add the prosciutto and toss quickly to coat the bok choy with the broth and to mix in the prosciutto. Season to taste with salt and serve.

Photos: Scott Phillips



Japanese eggplant

is sweet and rich, with tender skin and a soft, creamy flesh. It's less bitter than large globe eggplant, so it doesn't need to be salted before cooking. Also, because this skinny variety is small and firm, it cooks faster and doesn't need as much oil as larger eggplants.

Shopping & prepping

Select firm, purple-black, shiny fruits with no soft or brown spots. Peeling is optional, and you can cut it almost any way you want: sliced, diced, or halved.

Flavor partners

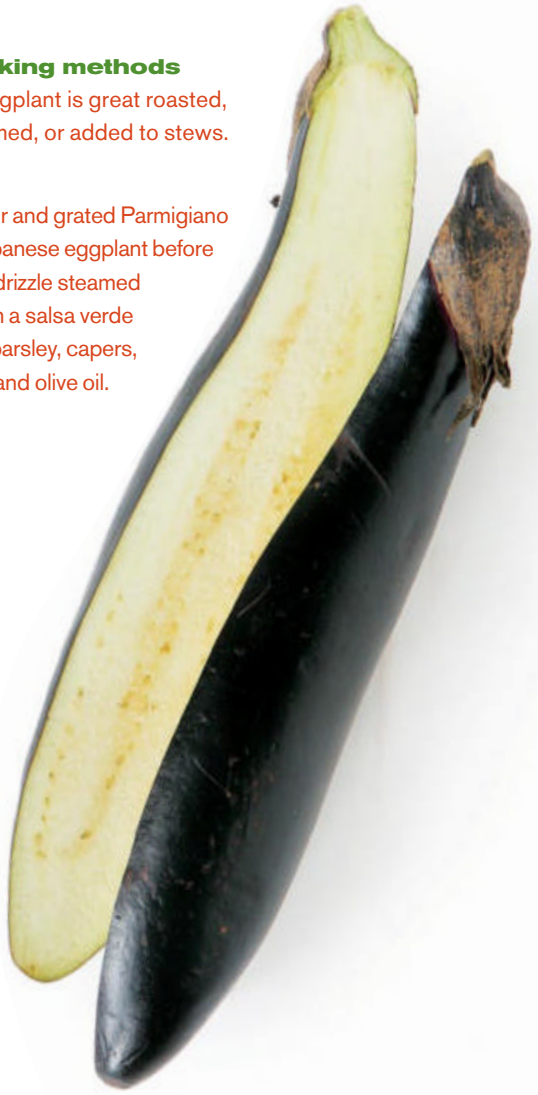
It goes well with basil, mint, garlic, lime, chiles, miso, sesame, peanuts, red curry, vinegar, and honey.

Best cooking methods

Japanese eggplant is great roasted, grilled, steamed, or added to stews.

Ideas

Spread butter and grated Parmigiano on halved Japanese eggplant before roasting. Or drizzle steamed eggplant with a salsa verde of chopped parsley, capers, lemon juice, and olive oil.



Roasted Eggplant with Chiles, Peanuts & Mint

Serves four to six as a side dish.

I usually serve this dish as an appetizer, but you can also serve it as a side dish for roasted lamb or pork.

¼ cup unsalted peanuts
5 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. peanut oil
Kosher salt
4 skinny Japanese eggplant (about 7 inches long and 1½ inches in diameter)
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes; more to taste
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
1 tsp. honey
12 medium fresh mint leaves, coarsely torn (about 3 Tbs.)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

Scatter the peanuts in a pie plate or other small baking dish and toss them with 1 tsp. oil and a generous pinch of salt. Roast, shaking the pan once or twice, until they are golden brown, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool, and then coarsely chop them. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F.

Rinse the eggplant. Trim off their tops and then cut the eggplant in half lengthwise. In a large, shallow bowl, toss the eggplant with 2 Tbs. of the oil and the red pepper flakes. Put the eggplant cut side up on a rimmed baking sheet and sprinkle generously with salt. Roast until the eggplant is tender when pierced with a fork and the flesh is a light golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small dish, whisk the remaining 3 Tbs. oil with the lime juice, honey, and ¼ tsp. salt. Season to taste with more salt, if necessary.

With the eggplant still on the center rack, turn the broiler on to high and broil the eggplant until well browned on top, about 5 minutes. Transfer the eggplant to a serving platter. Drizzle with the dressing. Sprinkle with mint and peanuts and serve.



Napa cabbage has ruffled, light-green leaves that are as tender as lettuce and crunchy white stems that are similar in texture to green cabbage.

Shopping & prepping

Look for medium-size cabbages that feel heavy for their size and have plenty of light-green leaves. You can cut napa cabbage any way you would cut green cabbage.

Flavor partners

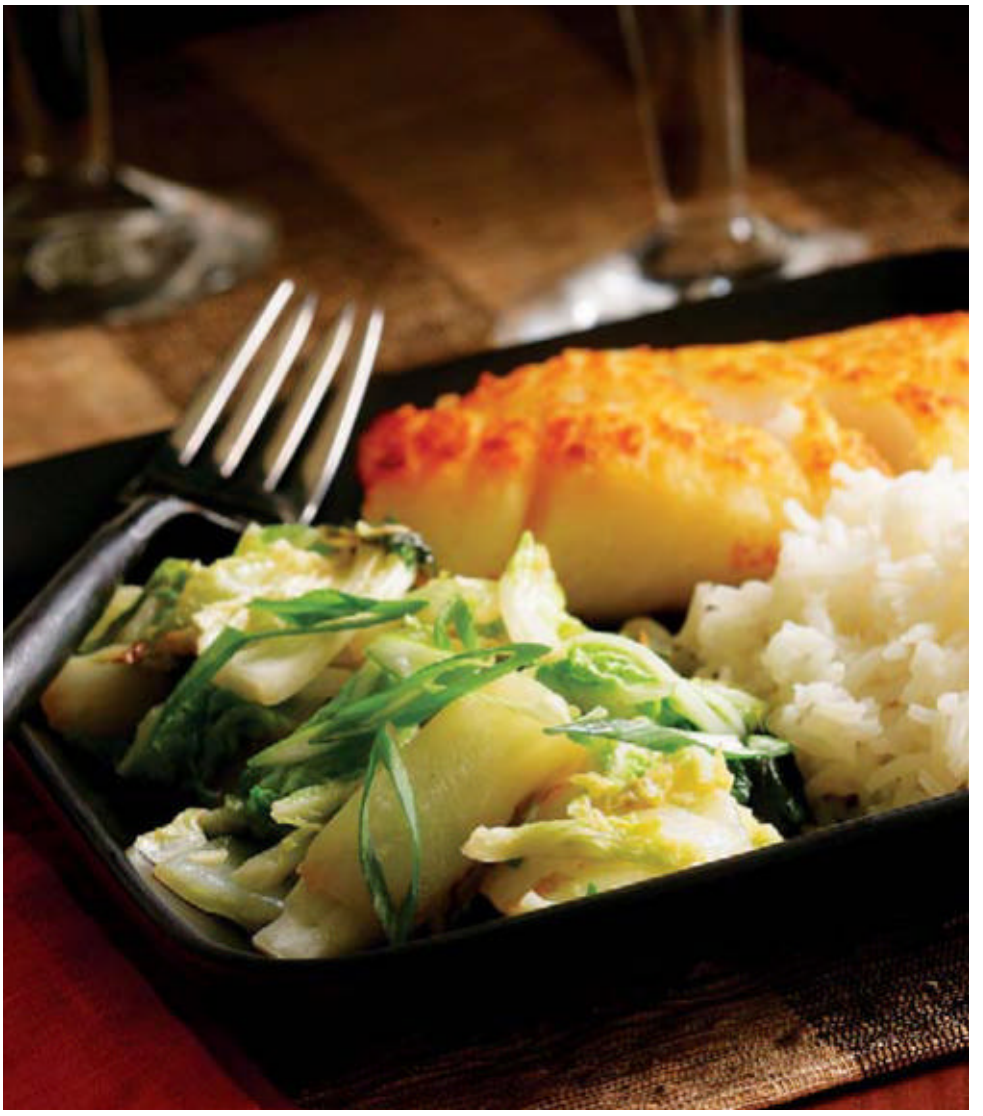
Napa's delicate floral spiciness pairs well with garlic, chives, mushrooms, carrots, radishes, ginger, and cured meats, such as bacon, prosciutto, speck, and even prepared duck confit.

Best cooking methods

Napa cabbage is juicy and sweet when braised, sautéed, or stir-fried, but it's equally good raw in salads or slaws.

Ideas

I like to slice it thinly and put together either a slaw with sliced radishes, lime juice, and a little sugar, or a fresh salad with apples and a vinaigrette made with chives and apple-cider vinegar.



Stir-Fried Napa Cabbage with Garlic, Fresh Chile & Basil

Serves four as a side dish.

Try this with roasted chicken, sautéed chicken thighs, or pan-seared fish fillets.

1 medium-small head napa cabbage (about 1¾ lb.)
1 Tbs. canola oil
3 medium cloves garlic, coarsely chopped (about 1 Tbs.)
1 Tbs. fish sauce
1½ tsp. granulated sugar
¼ tsp. kosher salt
½ medium serrano chile, coarsely chopped (don't seed)
¼ cup roughly torn fresh basil leaves
2 to 3 tsp. fresh lime juice
2 medium scallions, thinly sliced on an extreme diagonal, for garnish

Slice the cabbage in half lengthwise. Position one half cut side up and slice it across the middle at the point where the ruffled, leafy top gives way to white stem (top left photo). Remove the core, slice the stem end lengthwise into 1½-inch-thick wedges, and cut the wedges crosswise into 1½-inch pieces (the leaves will separate). Cut the leafy half in the same way. Keep the leaves and stems separate. Repeat with the remaining half cabbage. You should have about 5 cups stems and 4 cups leaves.

Heat a wok or a 12-inch skillet over high heat for about 45 seconds and then add the oil, swirling it to coat the pan. When the oil is hot and shimmering, add the garlic and the white stems. Stir-fry until the stems brown lightly in spots and begin to release some liquid, about 2 minutes. Add the fish sauce, sugar, salt, and chile and toss. Continue to stir-fry until the stems are barely tender, about 2½ minutes.

Add the cabbage leaves, stirring quickly to move them to the bottom of the pan. As soon as the stems are just tender and the tops are barely wilted, 30 to 40 seconds more, remove from the heat and stir in the basil and 2 tsp. lime juice. Season to taste with salt, garnish with the scallions, and add more lime juice, if you like. Serve immediately.



Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Shiitakes and Ginger

Serves four as a side dish.

I like to serve these alongside steamed fish or sautéed chicken.

2 tsp. soy sauce (preferably Kikkoman "milder")
½ tsp. Asian sesame oil
1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. canola or other vegetable oil
6 medium shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and cut into ¼-inch slices (about 1 cup)
1 heaping Tbs. finely julienned fresh ginger (from about a 1-inch piece; see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 66)
¾ lb. snow peas (about 4 cups), trimmed (break off the stem end of each pea and pull the string away from the pod)
Kosher salt
1 tsp. sesame seeds, toasted, for garnish (optional)

In a small bowl, combine the soy sauce and sesame oil with 2 Tbs. water and set aside.

Heat a 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat for about 30 seconds and add 1 Tbs. canola oil, swirling it to coat the pan. When the oil is very hot, add the shiitakes and cook, stirring once, until they begin to brown lightly, about 1 minute. Add the ginger and stir-fry until the mushrooms are golden and the ginger has softened, 1 to 2 minutes more. Add the remaining 1 tsp. canola oil and then the snow peas and a pinch of salt. Stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the soy sauce mixture and continue to stir-fry until the peas are crisp-tender and the liquid has reduced to a glaze, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with salt to taste and garnish with the sesame seeds, if using. Serve immediately.

Andrea Reusing is the chef and owner of Lantern restaurant in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. ◆

Snow peas have more real pea flavor and are often less starchy than sugar snaps. Popular in the 1970s, snow peas should be poised for a revival because of their fresh green crunch, versatility, and fast cooking time.

Shopping & prepping

Choose dark green, dense-looking peas with no signs of drying or cracking. Trim them by breaking off the stem end and pulling the string away from the pod.

Flavor partners

Snow peas partner well with scallions, toasted sesame seeds, ginger, shellfish, and rich nut oils.

Best cooking methods

Snow peas are good eaten raw, blanched, steamed, and stir-fried.

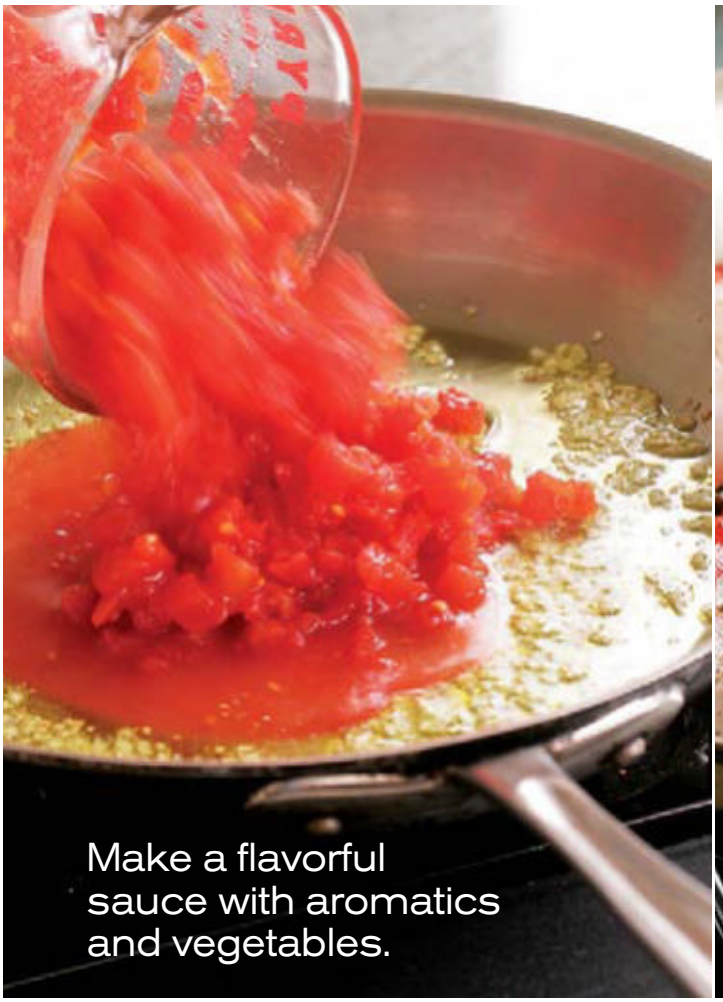
Ideas

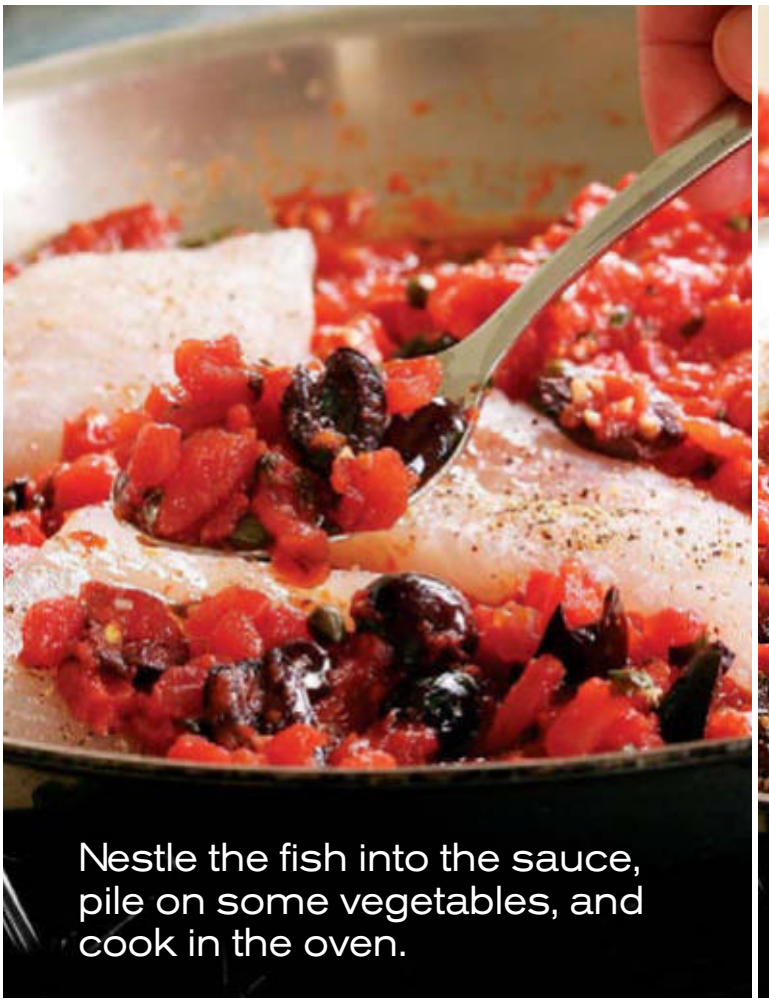
For a quick warm salad, briefly blanch and toss snow peas with a little vegetable oil, sea salt, and toasted sesame seeds. Or blanch them and toss them with good-quality butter and salt. I also like to quickly sauté them along with torn butter lettuce and scallions.



Quick-Braised Fish

A one-pan meal that's fast enough for weeknights and







BY ALLISON EHRI

To many of us, the word "braising" conjures up thoughts of slow-cooked short ribs, pot roast, or chicken, but probably not fish. The moist, slow heat of a braise is ideal for melting tough cuts of meat into tender morsels, so why bother using the technique with fish, which is naturally tender? Because by braising fish, you'll get the benefits—melt-in-your-mouth texture and a full-flavored pan sauce—without the long cooking time. The recipes here are speedy enough for a weeknight yet fancy enough for company. And the chunky vegetables in the braising liquid double as a vegetable side dish, so in the end, you have a saucy, hearty, one-pan meal.

I use a simple three-step method. First, I make the sauce, which includes vegetables, aromatics, and a liquid like wine or clam juice. Next, I nestle the fish into the sauce, piling some of the vegetables on top to keep the fish moist. Then I cover the pan and finish the dish in the oven. Once it's done, I remove the fish from the sauce. Though the sauce is perfectly delicious as is, in two of the recipes (the red snapper and the salmon), I like to reduce it slightly to concentrate the flavors, especially when I'm cooking for guests. This is also the perfect opportunity to add a few finishing touches, like vinegar or fresh herbs.

A few tools are helpful to have on hand when braising fish. I use an ovenproof skillet to make these dishes, but if you don't have one, you can transfer the fish and sauce to a Pyrex dish for the oven braising (just note that cooking times may be slightly longer). Also, a fish spatula comes in handy when removing the fish from the pan (see Where to Buy It, p. 72).

Photos: Scott Phillips

fancy enough for company



Remove the fish and finish the sauce.



Braised Red Snapper Puttanesca

Serves four.

Black sea bass makes a good substitute for snapper in this recipe. If you buy a whole fish, see p. 69 for how to bone it.

4 5-oz. skinless red snapper fillets (about ¾ inch thick)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3 medium cloves garlic, minced (about 1 Tbs.)
2 14½-oz. cans petite-diced tomatoes
2 anchovy fillets, minced
½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, halved lengthwise (about 3 oz.)
3 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh basil leaves
1 Tbs. capers, rinsed
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh mint
2 tsp. red-wine vinegar

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Season the snapper all over with salt and pepper. Let sit at room temperature while you prepare the sauce.

Heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet over medium-low heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until softened but not golden, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes and their juice, anchovies, olives, 2 Tbs. of the basil, capers, and pepper flakes to the pan. Bring the sauce to a brisk simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are tender and the juices have reduced to a saucy consistency, about 8 minutes.

Nestle the snapper fillets into the sauce, spooning some on top to keep the fish moist. Drizzle with the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil. Tightly cover the pan with a lid or aluminum foil and braise in the oven until the fish is almost cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes, depending on thickness (see the tip on p. 60).

With a slotted spatula, transfer the snapper to 4 shallow serving bowls. If the sauce seems too thin, simmer over medium-high heat until thickened to your liking. Stir the remaining 1 Tbs. basil and the mint and vinegar into the sauce and spoon it over the fish.

Serving suggestion: Serve with polenta or couscous.

TRY IT WITH OTHER FISH

Once you've mastered the quick-braising method with snapper, cod, and salmon, you can experiment with other fish, such as grouper, barramundi, black sea bass, striped bass, or halibut. Remember that cooking times may vary, depending on the thickness and texture of the fish, so be sure to sneak a peek before removing it from the sauce.





tip: To check if your fish is done, use a paring knife to peek between two bits of flesh in the center of the fillet. The very middle should look ever-so-slightly translucent, which means it's almost cooked through. The fish will continue to cook as you finish your sauce, so it'll be perfectly done by the time you're ready to serve it.

Salmon Braised in Pinot Noir

Serves four.

4 5-oz. skinless salmon fillets (preferably 1 inch thick)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
6 oz. medium-small cremini or white mushrooms, quartered (about 18, 2½ to 3 cups)
1 large celery stalk, cut into small dice (about ¾ cup)
2 small carrots, cut into small dice (about ½ cup)
1 small leek, white and light green parts only, cut into medium dice (⅓ to ½ cup)
2 tsp. tomato paste
1 cup Pinot Noir
1 bay leaf
1 large sprig fresh thyme, plus 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme leaves
1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth
½ cup heavy cream
1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F.

Season the salmon all over with salt and pepper. Let sit at room temperature while you prepare the sauce.

Melt the butter in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are browned on at least one side, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the carrots and leeks and cook, stirring occasionally, until just softened, about 4 minutes (reduce the heat to medium if the pan starts to get dark). Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the Pinot Noir, bay leaf, and thyme sprig, scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to release any browned bits, and boil until the wine is reduced by about half, 2 to 4 minutes. Add the chicken broth and cream and bring to a brisk simmer.

Nestle the salmon fillets into the vegetables and pile some of the vegetables on top of the fillets to keep the fish moist. Tightly cover the pan with a lid or aluminum foil and braise in the oven until the fish is almost cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes, depending on thickness (see the tip at left).

With a slotted spatula, transfer the salmon to 4 shallow serving bowls. Concentrate the sauce by placing the pan over medium-high heat and boiling until it's thickened to your liking. Discard the bay leaf and thyme sprig. Stir in the chopped thyme and parsley, season to taste with salt and pepper, spoon the sauce over the salmon, and serve.

Serving suggestion: Mashed potatoes or rice pilaf makes a nice accompaniment to this dish.



Braised Cod with Fennel, Potatoes & Littlenecks

Serves four.

You could use halibut in place of the cod.

4 5-oz. cod fillets (preferably 1 inch thick)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 small fennel bulb (about ¾ lb.), trimmed (leave core intact) and cut into ½-inch wedges, plus 1 Tbs. chopped fronds
2 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 medium-large shallot, chopped
2 8-oz. bottles clam juice
8 oz. small baby red or fingerling potatoes, scrubbed and sliced into ⅛-inch-thick coins, ends discarded (about 6 potatoes)
1 large tomato, cut into small dice (12 oz., about 1½ cups)
2 Tbs. anisette liqueur, such as Pernod or Sambuca
1 bay leaf
1 large sprig fresh thyme
¼ tsp. roughly chopped or coarsely ground fennel seed
A generous pinch of saffron, crumbled (about 25 threads)
12 littleneck clams, scrubbed
1½ Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Season the cod with salt and pepper. Let it sit at room temperature while you prepare the braising mixture.

Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fennel, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and pepper and brown on both sides, about 5 minutes total. Remove the pan from the heat and transfer the fennel to a plate. Put the pan over low heat and add the garlic, shallot, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Cook, stirring, until just softened, 1 to 2 minutes.

Add the clam juice, potatoes, tomato, liqueur, bay leaf, thyme, fennel seed, and saffron to the skillet. Raise the heat to medium and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 3 minutes to start the potatoes cooking. Nestle the cod pieces and clams into the sauce, piling the fennel on top of the fish and making sure all of the potatoes are submerged. Tightly cover the pan with a lid or aluminum foil and braise in the oven until the fish is almost cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes, depending on thickness (see the tip at far left).

With a slotted spatula, transfer the cod to 4 shallow bowls. Bring the braising liquid, clams, and vegetables to a brisk simmer on top of the stove, cover the pan, and cook until the clams are opened and the vegetables are tender, 3 to 6 minutes more. Divide the opened clams (discard any unopened ones) and vegetables among the bowls. Add the fennel fronds and parsley to the braising liquid in the pan. Bring to a simmer and pour over the fish and vegetables.

Serving suggestion: Crusty garlic bread served alongside is perfect for soaking up the flavorful sauce.

Allison Ehri is Fine Cooking*'s test kitchen associate and food stylist.* ◆



tip: Fillets that are ¾ to 1 inch thick work best, but if you can find only long, thin ones, they will do. Score the fish crosswise on the bone side, being sure to cut only halfway through. Flip the fillets over and fold them in half, skin side in, and proceed as if they were thick fillets. As the fish cooks, it will firm up and hold this shape.

With a few shortcuts, these Playful Desserts are easy to put together

BY GALE GAND



As the executive pastry chef of an innovative restaurant, it's my job to come up with sensational desserts that not only taste great but also prompt gushing oohs and aahs with their originality. The catch is that most of these creations require hours of prep time, not to mention years of experience. You couldn't make them at home, and truth be told, neither could I. With twin toddlers, a 10-year-old, four restaurants, and a TV show, I run on a tight schedule. But I still like to impress my family and friends with imaginative desserts that are big on flavor yet easy to make. With a few simple tricks—and a little creativity—I've found that I can pull it off. And so can you. Here's how I've done it in the three desserts on these pages.

I limit the number of ingredients. Measuring, cutting, and chopping a lot of ingredients takes time. For these desserts, I never use more than eight ingredients—often fewer. But I'm a stickler for quality. I look for the best raw materials, so I don't have to do much to them to coax out great flavor. For the pear tarts, for example, try to get your hands on some juicy pears at the peak of ripeness.

I use store-bought doughs. The secret to making these desserts without spending hours in the kitchen is to use prepared ingredients like frozen puff pastry, phyllo dough, and wonton wrappers, as well as jarred spreads, juice concentrates, and ice cream. To liven up my homemade sweets and elicit that jolt of surprise, I sometimes put a whimsical twist on a classic dessert, as in my redesigned pear tarts (the crust opens like a blossom), or a sweet spin on a savory dish, like my sweet chips and dip or fried wontons with orange dipping sauce.

Photos: Scott Phillips



A sweet take on chips 'n' dip

Phyllo Chips with Vanilla Ice Cream & Strawberry Mash "Dip"

Serves eight.

Forget about nachos and salsa—for dessert lovers like me, this is the ultimate take on chips and dip.

3 9x14-inch sheets frozen phyllo dough, thawed overnight in the refrigerator (see box at right)
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted
6½ Tbs. granulated sugar; more as needed
1 pint strawberries, rinsed and hulled
1 pint good-quality vanilla ice cream, slightly softened

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Line a 13x17-inch baking sheet with parchment. Put one sheet of phyllo on the pan and brush with some of the melted butter. Sprinkle evenly with 1½ Tbs. sugar and lay another sheet of phyllo on top. Brush with the melted butter and sprinkle with 1½ Tbs. sugar. Lay the last sheet of phyllo on top, brush with more melted butter, and sprinkle with 1½ Tbs. sugar.

With the tip of a sharp knife, cut the phyllo lengthwise into 4 even strips. Then cut each strip on the diagonal, alternating the direction of the knife to form little triangles (see photo below right). Cover with parchment and set another baking sheet on top. This will keep the phyllo from buckling during baking.

Bake until the phyllo is golden brown (lift the pan and top piece of parchment to check the color), about 15 minutes. To keep the phyllo chips extra flat, let them cool before unstacking the pans and removing the chips. They are best served the same day but will stay crisp for 2 days if stored in an airtight container.

While the chips are baking, make the strawberry mash. With a pastry cutter or a potato masher, smash the strawberries in a medium bowl with the remaining 2 Tbs. sugar until pulverized but still a bit chunky. Taste; I like it on the tart side since the phyllo chips and ice cream are quite sweet. Cover with plastic wrap and keep chilled.

Put two scoops of vanilla ice cream in eight individual dessert bowls and spoon about an eighth of the strawberry mash over each portion. Tuck some phyllo chips in the ice cream or serve the chips on the side. If the ice cream is soft enough, you can use the chips to scoop it like a dip.

ingredient



Twin-pack phyllo is best

We used phyllo from a 1-lb. twin pack to test this recipe. Twin-pack sheets are 9 by 14 inches, smaller than those from a single pack. If you can find only larger, single-pack phyllo, either cut the sheets to size or use the larger sheets as they are, sprinkling 2 Tbs. sugar instead of 1½ Tbs. between each layer. Frozen phyllo dough is available in grocery stores. For this recipe you'll need only three phyllo sheets. Thaw one entire roll and refreeze what you don't need.

tip



To make it easier to cut the phyllo chip triangles, slightly separate each strip before you begin.

Mini tarts open like blossoms



Free-Form Pear Tarts with Almond & Cinnamon

Yields 4 tarts.

Serve topped with a quenelle of vanilla ice cream, if you like. (To learn how to make ice-cream quenelles, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 66).

¼ cup granulated sugar
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 sheet frozen puff pastry (9¾-inch square), thawed overnight in the refrigerator
Flour for dusting
2 Tbs. almond paste (from a can or tube)
4 tsp. sour cream
2 small firm-ripe pears (preferably Bartlett), peeled, cored, and cut into 12 wedges each

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment. Combine the sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Unroll or unfold the puff pastry on a lightly floured surface. Pinch any creases together and then smooth them out with your fingertips. Cut the pastry sheet into four equal squares and transfer them to the lined baking sheet.

Roll 1½ tsp. of almond paste into a small ball, flatten it slightly with the palm of your hand, and put it in the center of one puff pastry square. Drop 1 tsp. of sour cream on top. Sprinkle about ½ Tbs. of the cinnamon sugar over the sour cream. Arrange four pear wedges in the center of the puff pastry, two leaning away from the center one way and two leaning the other way. Sprinkle with another ½ Tbs. of the cinnamon sugar. Repeat with the remaining three puff pastry squares and filling ingredients—you won't need all of the sliced pears.

Fold the corners of the puff pastry over the pears until the tips are just touching but not overlapping and press the dough against the pears. (The tarts won't look pretty now, but they'll be beautiful once they bake and puff up.) Bake until puffed and golden brown on the edges, 22 to 27 minutes. Let cool. Any juices that leak onto the baking sheet will harden to a candy-like consistency, so break off and discard these bits before serving.

ingredient



Almond paste

Made with finely ground blanched almonds and sugar, almond paste is commonly used in cake batters and pastry fillings. It's also the base ingredient in marzipan (which is made by adding hot sugar syrup and light corn syrup to almond paste). In this recipe, almond paste provides a subtle, perfumy almond flavor that marries perfectly with the sweetness of the pears. You'll find cans or tubes of almond paste in most grocery stores. For mail-order sources, see p. 72.

tip



Arrange four pear slices in the center of a puff pastry square, sprinkle with cinnamon sugar, and then bring the pastry edges together so they touch but don't overlap. This allows the puff pastry tips to "blossom" while baking.

An unexpected sweet filling for fried wontons

ingredient



Nutella

Available in many supermarkets, Nutella is a brand of creamy chocolate-hazelnut spread whose flavor is similar to that of gianduja, the hazelnut-flavored chocolate from the Piedmont region of Italy. Italian children enjoy Nutella spread on a slice of crusty bread. But it's also great when you need a chocolate filling in a pinch. You can substitute other brands of chocolate-hazelnut spread. For mail-order sources, see p. 72.

tip



Use a second teaspoon to help drop a dollop of Nutella on the lower half of the wonton wrappers.



Fried Chocolate-Hazelnut Wontons with Orange Dipping Sauce

Serves six.

Look for wonton wrappers in the produce section of the supermarket. If not frying immediately, you can stuff the wontons and refrigerate them for up to 2 days. Just cover tightly with plastic wrap to prevent them from drying out. The sauce can also be made ahead and refrigerated for one day.

24 wonton wrappers, preferably square
1 13-oz. jar Nutella (or other chocolate-hazelnut spread), chilled
¾ cup heavy cream
½ cup thawed orange juice concentrate
2 tsp. Grand Marnier
¼ tsp. pure vanilla extract
3 cups vegetable oil for frying
Confectioners' sugar for serving

Set out a bowl of water and a pastry brush. If necessary, trim the wonton wrappers into squares. Lay the wrappers on a work surface, orienting them so they look diamond shaped instead of square. Working quickly, put 1 heaping tsp. of chilled Nutella in the lower half of each diamond. Brush the edges of one wonton with a little water and fold the top point of the diamond down to meet the bottom, forming a triangle. Gently press around the filling to force out any air and pinch the edges to seal. Repeat with the remaining wontons. Set the wontons on a baking sheet, cover, and keep chilled.

In a small bowl, combine the heavy cream with the orange juice concentrate, Grand Marnier, and vanilla. Refrigerate the sauce until ready to serve.

Heat the oil to 365°F in a heavy 3-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Set a baking sheet lined with a thick layer of paper towels next to the pot. Slip 6 to 8 wontons into the oil and fry, turning occasionally, until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Scoop them out with a slotted spoon and drain on the paper towels while you fry the rest.

Arrange 4 wontons on individual serving plates and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. Serve with small individual dishes (I like tea bowls or sake cups) filled with the orange sauce for dipping.

Gale Gand is the executive pastry chef and partner at four restaurants in Chicago, including Tru and Gale's Coffee Bar. ◆

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BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

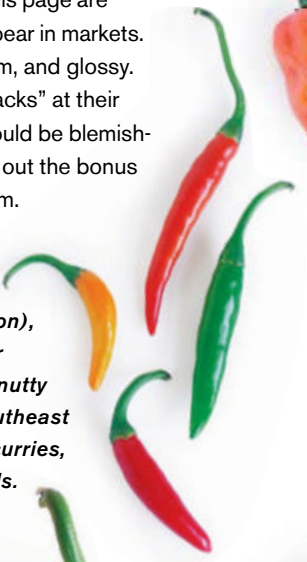
FC's field guide to fresh hot chiles

In our experience, most supermarkets do a decent job of stocking a variety of fresh hot chiles, but identifying them is another thing. They're often mislabeled, and sometimes they're just in an anonymous jumble. On this page are some of the varieties that commonly appear in markets. Fresh chiles should be smooth, firm, and glossy. Some jalapeños may have "scar cracks" at their stem ends, but other varieties should be blemish-free. For more on chiles, check out the bonus download at FineCooking.com.



Jalapeño

Medium hot. Usually sold green, but occasionally sweeter, ripe red jalapeños appear in markets. Vegetal flavor. An all-purpose hot chile often used raw in salsas and guacamole.



Thai bird

Very hot. Either red (most common), green, orange, or yellow. Peppery, nutty flavor. Use in Southeast Asian stir-fries, curries, soups, and salads.



Habanero

Very, very hot. Either orange (most common), red, yellow, or green. Incendiary, fruity flavor. Use in fruit salsas, hot sauces, and marinades.



Serrano

Very hot. Sold green (unripe) or red (ripe). Tangy, herbal, vegetal flavor. Use raw in hot salsa or cooked in curries and chili.



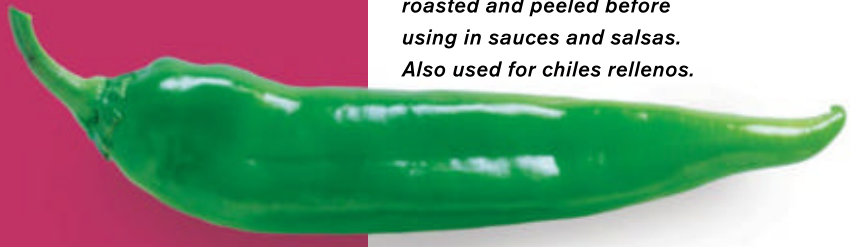
Banana wax

Mild. Yellow-green, long, and tapered. Sweet, slightly fruity flavor. Add raw to mild salsas or roast and use in tacos or as a pizza topping.



Fresno

Mild to medium hot. Almost always sold red; often mistaken for a red jalapeño. Spicy, sweet flavor, like that of a red bell pepper but hot. Try raw in slaws and dips or cooked in soups.



Anaheim

Mild. Usually sold green. Sweet, crisp, vegetal flavor. Typically roasted and peeled before using in sauces and salsas. Also used for chiles rellenos.



Poblano

Mild to medium hot. Dark green and large. Sweet vegetal flavor, reminiscent of green bell pepper but hot. Usually roasted for use in sauces and enchiladas, or stuffed, batter-dipped, and fried to make chiles rellenos.

Cutting ginger into fine julienne

The recipe for Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Shiitakes & Ginger on p. 57 calls for ginger cut into very fine julienne. Here's how to do it (this method works for thicker julienne, too—just make the cuts a little wider).



Peel the ginger with a paring knife or by scraping off the skin with the side of a spoon.



Slice the ginger very thinly lengthwise. Stack several of the slices and then shingle them.



Thinly slice down the row of shingles to make your julienne.

Choose chuck for the best beef stew

One of the best cuts of beef for making beef stew is chuck. Chuck comes from the well-exercised shoulder and upper foreleg of the steer, so it has lots of tough connective tissue and sinew, a quality that makes it unsuitable for dry-heat, short-cooking methods like grilling and sautéing. But slow, moist, gentle cooking (stewing or braising) transforms the toughness into delectable fork-tenderness and rich flavor.

So when you go to shop for the Beef Stew with Red Wine and Carrots recipe on p. 39, you know you want chuck. But the chuck is a big part of the steer—it accounts for more than 25% of the animal—and it consists of several different muscles, each with its own characteristics affecting texture and cooking times. At the market, you'll have a choice of cuts from the chuck, and some are better for stews than others. To avoid confusion, head to the store with the cheat sheet below. Cuts labeled with any of these terms will give you a stew with more uniform texture and great flavor.

—Molly Stevens, contributing editor

Look for these labels

- Top blade
- Blade
- Flat iron
- Shoulder
- 7-bone roast (named after the 7-shaped blade bone)
- Chuck short ribs (purchase extra since they're fattier and need heavy trimming)

Sizing up shallots

Shallots are a great way to bring a mellow oniony flavor to your cooking without the biting astringency of a regular onion. They're a big flavor element in the Beef Stew with Red Wine and Carrots on p. 39, and we also particularly like to use them raw in vinaigrettes or cooked in pan sauces.

The size of shallots is quite variable, and some shallots have more than one lobe. When we call for a medium shallot, we're referring to a ¾ to 1 ounce shallot, regardless of how many lobes it has. A medium shallot yields about 2 tablespoons finely chopped or ¼ cup thinly sliced. One lobe of a large double-lobed shallot may be equivalent to a medium shallot.

—Allison Ehri, test kitchen associate



A medium shallot (shown life-size here) is quite a bit larger than a quarter and weighs a little less than an ounce.



Calibrate your instant-read thermometer

An instant-read thermometer is a must-have tool for checking temperatures and gauging the doneness of all sorts of things. Because you rely on your thermometer for accuracy, it's a good idea to check its calibration occasionally and adjust it as need be.

To check the calibration, bring a small pan of water to a rolling boil and take the water's temperature; it should be 212°F or a few degrees less, depending on your altitude and air pressure. (For the boiling point in your location, visit www.virtualweberbullet.com/boilingpoint.html.)

If the calibration is off, you can adjust a standard (analog) thermometer by turning the hex nut under the thermometer's face with pliers (photo above). If the nut resists, use a second set of pliers to grip the sides of the face and turn the tools in opposite directions.

There are only a few models of digital thermometers that can be adjusted. Some calibrate automatically, and others need manual adjustment; follow the manufacturer's instructions for your model.

food safety

Wish your hands a happy birthday

We doubt it's news to you that hand washing is an important part of cooking, but you might be surprised to learn that to effectively remove germs, you should soap your hands for at least 20 seconds, and that's longer than you probably think it is. Next time you wash your hands, try this: Sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice as you vigorously lather your hands with soap. That takes 20 seconds—longer than you thought, right? It's not necessary to do this if you just need to wash some bread dough off your hands, but it's a good practice after handling raw meat and seafood or other potentially hazardous foods. And if "Happy Birthday" isn't in your top 10, the "ABC" song takes 20 seconds, too.

leftovers:

Braised lamb shanks become a pizza

Use the leftovers from the Braised Lamb Shanks with Garlic & Vermouth recipe on p. 35 to make a richly flavored topping for a weeknight pizza supper.



Middle Eastern Style Lamb Pita "Pizza"

Serves two to four.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for brushing
½ small yellow onion, finely diced (about ½ cup)
1 medium clove garlic, finely chopped (about 1 tsp.)
Kosher salt
1½ tsp. cumin seeds, roughly chopped and toasted
½ tsp. ground allspice
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more as needed
¾ cup Pomì brand chopped tomatoes with juice (or substitute canned petite-diced tomatoes)
2 leftover braised lamb shanks, plus 1 Tbs. sauce (from Braised Lamb Shanks with Garlic & Vermouth recipe, p. 35)
2 Tbs. roughly chopped fresh mint
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice; more as needed
2 regular-size (6- to 7-inch) pita pockets, split in half to form four thin rounds
½ cup plain whole-milk yogurt

Position two oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Heat the olive oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat until just shimmering. Cook the onion and garlic in the oil with a pinch of salt, stirring occasionally, until softened, 3 to 5 minutes. Add ¾ tsp. of the toasted cumin seeds, the allspice, red pepper flakes, and black pepper and cook, stirring, until just fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, until all the liquid has evaporated, 5 to 8 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, pull the lamb meat from the bones and cut it into chunks (you should have about 1½ cups). Pulse the lamb in the food processor until it is roughly chopped, resembling the texture of very coarsely ground meat. Add the tomato sauce, lamb sauce, 1 Tbs. of the mint, the lemon juice, and ¾ tsp. salt and pulse just to combine. Adjust the salt, pepper, and lemon juice to taste.

Put the pita halves on two baking sheets and brush them generously on both sides with olive oil. Position them with the inner sides facing up and divide the lamb mixture among the pitas, spreading it evenly over the surfaces. Bake until crisp, 5 to 10 minutes. Serve the pitas drizzled with some of the yogurt and sprinkled with the remaining toasted cumin, mint, and some freshly ground black pepper. Serve with the remaining yogurt on the side.

Photos: Scott Phillips

How to fillet a whole fish

While testing the Braised Red Snapper Puttanesca recipe on p. 59, we occasionally couldn't find snapper fillets, but we could find whole snappers. No problem—filleting a snapper (or any other similar fish) is easy if you follow these steps. Just be sure to use your sharpest knife, whether it's a fillet knife or a chef's knife.

A note on fish scales

Before you fillet a whole fish, it should be scaled. Doing the job yourself isn't difficult, but it's messy, because the scales tend to fly all over and you find them in weird places around the kitchen for days after. For this reason, we always ask the fish monger to do the scaling for us. And actually, a good fish monger will also fillet the fish for you, but where's the fun in that?

—*A. E.*



1 *Rinse the fish under running water and pat dry. Position it on a cutting board with its back towards you. Using a sharp knife held behind the gills and side fin, cut straight down halfway through the fish to the backbone, being sure to include the meaty spot right behind the top of the head.*



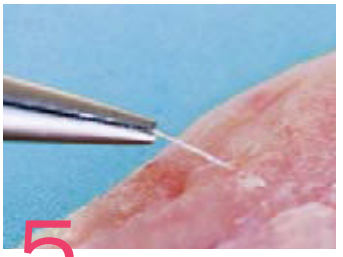
2 *Turn the knife parallel to the board (at a 90-degree angle to your first cut) and cut along the spine from head to tail, removing the belly flap with the fillet. You'll need to apply a fair amount of pressure at first to break through the rib bones. As you cut, press down firmly on top of the fish to steady it.*



3 *Finish removing the fillet by cutting all the way through the skin at the tail. Repeat steps 1 through 3 on the other side of the fish.*



4 *Remove the rib bones and belly flap by cutting under the top of the rib bones to the bottom of the fillet at a 45-degree angle. There is some meat here, but on small fish it is minimal. (On larger fish like tuna, this fatty belly is thicker and very flavorful.)*



5 *Finally, check for pin bones. Some fish have little bones that run along the mid-line of the fillet and are nearly impossible to see. To remove them, feel along the fillet to locate each bone and then pluck it out with a pair of clean needle-nose or fish pliers. Pull the bones out in the direction they are pointing, as you would a splinter.*



Put the fillet, skin side down, on the cutting board. Starting at the tail end and holding the knife parallel to the cutting board, slice between the flesh and the skin, as close to the skin as possible, until you can grasp the tail end of the skin with a paper towel. With the knife angled ever so slightly down toward the skin, slice along the skin, using a gentle sawing motion. As you slice, simultaneously pull on the tail skin in the opposite direction to maintain pressure on the cutting edge of the knife. If you miss a spot, trim it away.



Buy tangy Mexican crema, or make it yourself

Crema is the Mexican version of French crème fraîche. Both are slightly soured and thickened cream, milder and less thick than American sour cream, with crema being the thinnest. The recipe for Lime Chicken with Poblano Sour Cream on p. 78a will have a more authentic touch if made with crema. You can buy crema in Mexican markets or even in some supermarkets, but it's easy to make it yourself, and the result has a smoother flavor than that of the commercially prepared version.

Homemade Crema (Mexican Sour Cream)

Yields about 1 cup.

Use crema as you would sour cream, dolloping or drizzling it on soups, tacos, potatoes, or anything else that needs a little tang. Start with pasteurized cream if you can find it—it makes a richer, thicker crema than ultrapasteurized cream does.

1 cup heavy cream (pasteurized or ultrapasteurized)
1 Tbs. buttermilk (with active cultures)

In a small saucepan, warm the cream over medium-low heat to about 95°F, just enough to take off the chill. If it goes over 100°F, let it cool before continuing.

Stir in the buttermilk and transfer to a clean glass jar. Set the lid loosely on top of the jar—don't tighten—and let sit in a warm spot, such as near the stove or on top of the fridge, until the cream starts to thicken, 18 to 24 hours. Stir, tighten the lid, and refrigerate until the cream is thicker and thoroughly chilled, 12 to 24 hours more. Stir well before using. The crema should have a thick but pourable consistency.

It will keep for about 2 weeks in the refrigerator, continuing to thicken as it ages.

Quenelles dress up a plate

Sometimes all that stands between home cooking and restaurant-quality food is presentation. There are lots of tricks up a chef's sleeve for stage-dressing food, and one of them is the quenelle. The term traditionally refers to a small football-shaped dumpling of poached meat or fish pâté, but these days it's generally used to describe a three-sided oval shape that makes for a classy presentation of ice cream (see the picture of the pear tarts on p. 64), goat cheese, crème fraîche, mashed potatoes, or anything soft and scoopable.

To make a quenelle, you need two spoons of the same size. The spoons' size determines the quenelle's size. *—A. E.* ◆



1 *Hold a spoon in each hand with the bowls facing each other. With one spoon, scoop up a heaping spoonful of ice cream (or other food). Raspberry sorbet is shown here.*



2 *Press the second spoon against the side of the ice cream and scoop the contents out of the first spoon. You should have a nice smooth side where the ice cream was in the first spoon.*



3 *Repeat to form a third side. If it's not shaped to your liking, keep scooping until you have a nice three-sided football shape.*

Champagne Vinegar

BY LAURA GIANNATEMPO

While we don't necessarily think of Champagne vinegar as a pantry staple, it's a great ingredient for livening up vinaigrettes or adding a little punch to sauces (as in the Chicken with Vinegar & Onions recipe on p. 37). To find out which is best, *Fine Cooking* staffers conducted a blind tasting of five widely available brands, all from California or Italy. The results were anything but unanimous (we all seemed to have a different favorite), and no vinegar stood out as the undisputed winner. They're ranked below with our tasting notes.

Then we held a second tasting to sample Champagne vinegars made in France. This time, the comments were unequivocal—our tasters found them full-bodied and interesting, with authentic Champagne flavor. These vinegars are harder to find (although not necessarily more expensive), but if you're looking for that little hit of *je ne sais quoi,* they're worth seeking out, which is why they're in the winner's circle at right.

Top Picks

These three French Champagne vinegars were all made from Champagne wine that's fermented slowly in oak barrels to give it richness and complexity. Our favorite was **Delouis Fils.** We liked its rich, fruity aroma and mellow flavor, layered with hints of apple and caramel. But we also liked the herbal, honey-spice aroma and bright, balanced flavor of **Reims Champagne Vinegar by Clovis**, as well as the intense, oaky flavor of **La Marne.** For sources, see Where to Buy It, p. 72.





1 BELLINO

$4.19 (16.9 fl. oz.)

This amber-colored vinegar had a mild, fruity flavor with a pleasant tartness and slight floral notes. Some tasters also detected a sharp, green-apple flavor. In the vinaigrette, it seemed to maintain its character better than did most other vinegars.



2 O BASICS

$10.29 (6.8 fl. oz.)

This clear, light vinegar was on the mild side, with a subtle floral aroma and notes of nuts and sherry. It had a pleasantly fruity, oaky flavor and a slightly musty aftertaste that gave it some character. This vinegar would be a good choice for brightening up any vinaigrette or sauce.



3 COLAVITA

$8.49 (16.9 fl. oz.)

This vinegar's tart, lemony aroma, which some thought reminiscent of apples, was promising. But the flavor disappointed: Some of our tasters found it too acidic and not sufficiently complex. It would make a perfectly fine substitute for most commercial white-wine vinegars.



4 KIMBERLEY

$7.48 (12.7 fl. oz.)

By far the most distinctive of the bunch, this vinegar (available at Whole Foods Markets) was a dark amber color with a markedly sweet, oaky aroma. The flavor, too, was butterscotchy with sweet undertones, which reminded some tasters of sherry. While we liked its character, we found its flavor profile a bit too cloying for a Champagne vinegar.



5 B.R. COHN

$11.49 (6.7 fl. oz.)

This vinegar had the panel divided: Most tasters thought it was bland and lacking complexity, with an off flavor. A few found it had a decent balance of acidity and fruitiness. Overall, it wasn't a favorite, and given its steep price, we'd probably opt for a different brand if we had an alternative. ◆

Note: prices will vary.

Photos: Scott Phillips

where to buy it



Crème Brûlée, *p. 45*

A mini blowtorch is an essential tool to make Kim Masibay's crème brûlée. Kim prefers torches with longer nozzles; her two favorites are the Bonjour Professional Chef's Torch, available at Cooking.com (800-663-8810) for $39.95, and the Messermeister Cheflamme, available at ChefTools.com (866-716-2433) for $44.95.

Kim also likes Chicago Metallic's six-piece crème brûlée set, which includes an 8-inch-square aluminized-steel baking pan, a chrome wire rack, and four 6-ounce porcelain ramekins. It's $19.99 at KitchenKapers.com (800-455-5567).

Look for Madagascar vanilla beans (three for $6.29) at Penzeys .com (800-741-7787) and for Medaglia d'Oro instant espresso powder at GourmetSleuth.com (408-354-8281).



Bistro Cooking at Home, *p. 33*

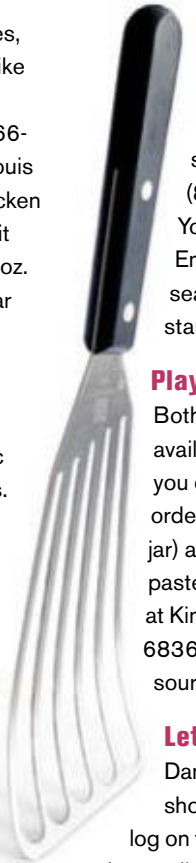
To cook Molly Stevens's bistro dishes, you'll need a large Dutch oven. We like Staub and Le Creuset brands, both available at ChefsResource.com (866-765-2433). Molly recommends Delouis Fils Champagne vinegar for her Chicken with Vinegar and Onions. You'll find it at Amazon.com ($6.48 for a 16.9 fl. oz. bottle; search for "white-wine vinegar from Champagne").

Asian Vegetables, *p. 53*

Fish sauce, soy sauce, and Asian sesame oil are available in the ethnic food sections of many supermarkets. But you can also mail-order these products, as well as Chinese rice wine, from OrientalPantry.com (978-264-4576).

Crispy Chicken, *p. 48*

You'll need a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet for Tony Rosenfeld's crispy chicken. If you don't have one, try DifferentDrummersKitchen.com (800-375-2665), where Chicago Metallic baking sheets are $7.99 each.



Quick-Braised Fish, *p. 58*

A 12-inch ovenproof skillet is best for these fish braises. We like All-Clad's stainless steel skillet, available at Cooking.com (800-663-8810) for $134.95. You'll find fish spatulas at Cooking Enthusiast.com (800-792-6650; search for "slotted spatula"); prices start at $27.99.

Playful Desserts, *p. 62*

Both almond paste and Nutella are available in many supermarkets. If you can't find them, you can mail-order Nutella ($3.39 for a 13-ounce jar) at Amazon.com and almond paste ($9.25 for a 10-ounce can) at KingArthurFlour.com (800-827-6836). For baking sheets, see the source under Crispy Chicken at left.

Letters, *p. 10*

Dansko clogs are available in many shoe stores. To find one near you, log on to Dansko.com. You can also buy them online for about $115 at Zappos.com.

Tasting Panel, *p. 71*

The vinegars ranked in our tasting panel are available in most grocery stores, including Whole Foods Markets. Among the French Champagne vinegars we liked, Delouis Fils ($6.48 for a 16.9 fl. oz. bottle; search for "white wine vinegar from Champagne") and La Marne ($16 for a 25 fl. oz. bottle) are both available at Amazon.com. Reims Champagne Vinegar by Clovis is available at Igourmet.com for $6.99 for a 16.75 fl. oz. bottle.

Back cover

Most specialty stores, and some grocery stores, sell du Puy lentils. You can also find them online at Kalustyans.com (800-352-3451) for $4.99 a pound. Kalustyan's also sells several brands of walnut oil, starting at $9.99 for a 250 ml bottle. ♦



Photos: Scott Phillips



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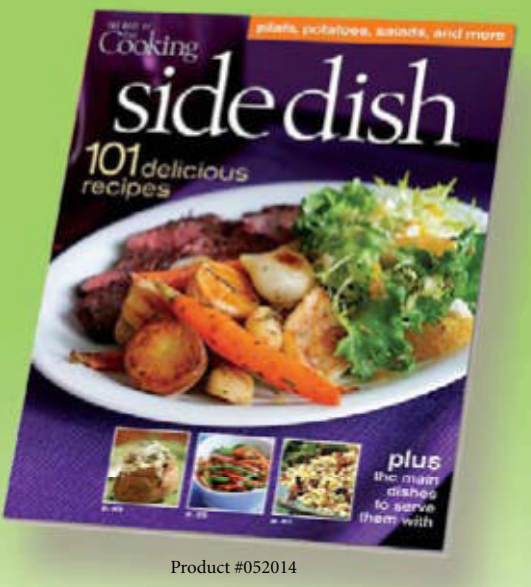
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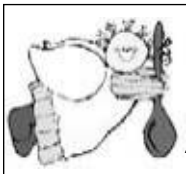
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nutrition**information**

Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	
		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	**Notes**
In Season	18												
Roasted Parsnips w/ Cinnamon & Coriander		250	120	2	31	14	2	10	1.5	0	160	9	based on 4 servings
Winter Pastas	26a												
Baked Fettucine w/ Asparagus, Lemon & Mascarpone		1040	520	39	96	57	29	16	10	195	770	13	based on 4 servings
Baked Ziti w/ Tomato, Mozzarella & Sausage		1070	390	54	113	44	20	17	5	110	1140	8	based on 4 servings
Campanelle w/ Broccoli Raab, Sausage & Olives		550	300	21	42	33	8	20	4	30	1540	5	based on 4 servings
Cavatappi w/ Roasted Peppers, Capocollo & Ricotta		1080	520	35	106	57	32	18	3	190	780	9	based on 4 servings
Classic Macaroni & Cheese		740	400	27	58	45	31	12	2	135	1040	3	based on 8 servings
Spaghetti w/ Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts		750	400	18	72	44	18	16	7	70	670	5	based on 4 servings
Baked Rigatoni w/ Cauliflower in a Spicy Pink Sauce		530	210	21	60	24	12	9	2	65	970	6	based on 8 servings
Bistro Cooking at Home	33												
Chicken w/ Vinegar & Onions		500	280	40	9	32	11	13	5	145	400	1	based on 6 servings
Braised Lamb Shanks w/ Garlic & Vermouth		360	180	32	1	20	7	10	1.5	120	360	0	based on 6 servings
Beef Stew w/ Red Wine & Carrots		580	230	49	20	25	9	12	1.5	160	630	4	based on 6 servings
Rice Pilaf	40												
Southwestern Rice Pilaf		200	40	5	36	4.5	0.5	3	0.5	0	290	2	based on 8 servings
Rice Pilaf w/ Sage, Parmigiano & Prosciutto		300	110	9	33	12	5	4	0.5	30	550	0	based on 8 servings
Rice Pilaf w/ Onions, Orange, Cherry & Pistachio		320	100	7	49	12	4.5	4.5	2	15	210	3	based on 8 servings
Saffron Rice Pilaf w/ Red Pepper & Toasted Almonds		200	40	5	34	4	0.5	2.5	1	0	170	1	based on 8 servings
Crème Brûlée	45												
Classic Crème Brûlée		470	390	5	18	43	26	13	2	345	85	0	based on 4 servings
Crispy Chicken	48												
Toasted Breadcrumbs		110	40	2	14	4.5	0.5	2.5	0.5	0	230	1	based on ¼ cup serving
Crispy Orange-Sesame Chicken Breasts		380	140	39	21	16	3	6	6	95	330	3	based on 4 servings
Herbed Chicken Breasts w/ an Olive-Parmigiano Crust		330	150	36	6	17	3	10	2	95	710	1	based on 4 servings
Crispy Cheddar & Jalapeño Coated Chicken Breasts		300	100	38	10	11	4	3.5	2	105	320	1	based on 4 servings
Crispy Chicken Breasts w/ Lemon & Capers		290	100	37	9	11	2.5	5	1.5	95	540	1	based on 4 servings
Asian Vegetables	53												
Braised Bok Choy w/ Sherry & Prosciutto		70	30	5	4	3.5	0.5	1	1	5	530	1	based on 6 servings
Stir-Fried Napa Cabbage w/ Garlic, Fresh Chile & Basil		80	30	3	10	3.5	0	2	1	0	440	3	based on 4 servings
Stir-Fried Snow Peas w/ Shiitakes & Ginger		110	50	3	13	6	0.5	3	2	0	360	3	based on 4 servings
Roasted Eggplant w/ Chiles, Peanuts & Mint		170	130	2	8	15	2.5	7	5	0	140	3	based on 6 servings
Quick-Braised Fish	58												
Braised Red Snapper Puttanesca		320	150	31	12	17	2.5	12	2.5	50	1360	0	based on 4 servings
Salmon Braised in Pinot Noir		480	190	36	11	22	11	6	2.5	145	440	2	based on 4 servings
Braised Cod w/ Fennel, Potatoes & Littlenecks		340	110	33	21	12	1.5	8	1.5	75	530	4	based on 4 servings
Playful Desserts	62												
Free-Form Pear Tarts w/ Almond & Cinnamon		380	170	5	47	19	5	10	2	5	300	4	based on 1 tart
Phyllo "Chips" w/ Ice Cream & Strawberry "Dip"		190	90	2	26	10	6	2.5	0.5	30	60	1	based on 8 servings
Fried Chocolate-Hazelnut Wontons w/ Dipping Sauce		460	220	6	53	25	9	10	4	45	210	3	based on 6 servings
Test Kitchen	66												
Homemade Crema (Mexican Sour Cream)		50	50	0	0	6	3.5	1.5	0	20	5	0	based on 1 Tbs.
Middle-Eastern-Style Lamb Pita "Pizza"		560	260	38	24	29	9	16	3	130	850	4	based on 4 servings
Quick & Delicious	78a												
Jerk Chicken Drumsticks		330	160	35	3	18	5	7	4	125	200	0	based on 6 servings
Lime Chicken w/ Poblano Sour Cream		540	350	39	4	39	11	17	6	160	700	1	based on 4 servings
Asian-Style Beef Barbecue in Lettuce Packages		410	100	28	48	11	3.5	4	1.5	45	710	3	based on 4 servings
Lamb Chops w/ Lemon, Thyme & Mustard Butter		720	510	50	0	57	27	22	4	225	500	0	based on 4 servings
Tuna Teriyaki w/ Scallion Salad		320	90	42	15	10	2.5	3	3	65	2050	1	based on 4 servings
Colossal Shrimp w/ Watercress & Tomato Salad		290	170	21	10	19	3	13	2.5	170	480	3	based on 4 servings
Deviled Pork Chops		650	270	85	6	30	10	14	2	230	870	0	based on 4 servings
Back Cover													
Warm French Lentil Salad w/ Smoked Sausage		390	180	17	30	21	3.5	9	6	25	610	7	based on 6 servings

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at Nutritional Solutions in Melville, New York. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the quantities of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ⅛ teaspoon salt and 1/16 teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

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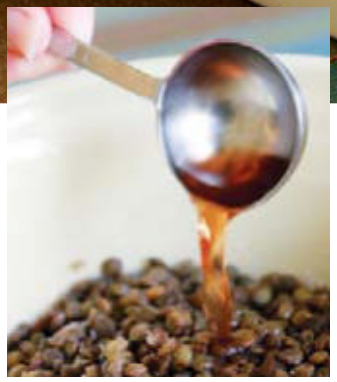
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Rustic French flavor à la minute

This classic bistro salad would make a fine first course to a warming winter dinner, but it's also good at the center of a weeknight meal. Just add a loaf of crusty bread and a tangle of lightly dressed mesclun greens for an easy but satisfying supper.



Season while hot for superior flavor

Toss the lentils with a little vinegar and salt immediately after draining, and you'll see a big boost in the flavor of the salad. Like potatoes, lentils firm up as they cool, which slows their ability to absorb seasonings.

For more bistro recipes, turn to p. 33.

Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage

Serves four to six.

The very small, dark greenish-brown du Puy lentils (also called French lentils) are firmer than brown lentils and hold their shape better during cooking (for sources, see p. 72). In France, the sausage would be saucisson à l'ail, a semi-cooked, smoked garlic sausage. Kielbasa makes a fine substitute.

1½ cups du Puy lentils (about 10 oz.)
3 fresh thyme sprigs
2 bay leaves
3 garlic cloves, smashed
¼ tsp. black peppercorns
1 small onion, peeled
1 small carrot, peeled and split lengthwise
8 oz. smoked sausage, such as kielbasa
1 cup dry white wine or dry white vermouth
2½ Tbs. red-wine vinegar; more as needed
2 tsp. Dijon mustard
Kosher salt
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3 Tbs. walnut oil
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
¼ cup finely chopped scallions (3 to 4 scallions)
Freshly ground black pepper

Pick over and rinse the lentils, and put them in a 3- to 4-qt. saucepan. Pile the thyme, bay leaves, garlic, and peppercorns on a 5-inch square of double-layer cheesecloth. Gather up the edges and tie into a little pouch with kitchen twine. Add the pouch to the pan along with the onion and carrot. Fill the pan with cold water to cover the lentils by about 2 inches, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Immediately lower to a gentle simmer—boiling can break the lentils—and simmer, uncovered, until just tender, 30 to 40 minutes. (If the water level drops below the surface of the lentils as they simmer, add a little more water.)

Meanwhile, put the sausage in a small saucepan or deep skillet. Add the wine and enough water to cover by about ½ inch. Bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat as needed to cook at a bare simmer (bubbles should only occasionally break the surface), uncovered, until a metal skewer inserted into the center comes out feeling hot to the touch, 15 to 20 minutes.

While the lentils and sausage cook, make the vinaigrette: In a medium bowl, whisk 1½ Tbs. of the vinegar with the mustard and a pinch of salt. In a steady stream, whisk in the olive and walnut oils. Season to taste with salt.

Drain the lentils, discarding the herb pouch, carrot, and onion. Transfer to a large bowl and add 1 tsp. salt and the remaining 1 Tbs. vinegar, tossing to coat. Drain the sausage, and, if necessary, peel off the casing (bite into a piece first—many sausage casings are thin enough to leave on). Slice into ¼-inch rounds. Add the sausage and vinaigrette to the lentils, tossing to coat. Stir in the parsley and scallions, and season with a generous amount of black pepper, plus more salt and vinegar to taste.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, *is the author of the award-winning* All About Braising. ◆

Photos: Scott Phillips

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Favorite Winter Pastas

COMPILED BY SARAH BRECKENRIDGE

On a blustery evening, there are few dishes as comforting as a hearty, hot pasta. So what better time, we thought, to offer you some of our favorite cold-weather pastas from past issues of *Fine Cooking*. As you might expect, we've included several baked pastas, like a gratin of macaroni and Cheddar and a baked ziti with sausage and tomatoes. But winter pastas can also be as quick as spaghetti tossed with the earthy flavors of mushrooms and sage, or campanelle with sausage and broccoli raab. In fact, you may just be tempted to make one of them for dinner tonight.



Baked Rigatoni with Cauliflower in a Spicy Pink Sauce

Serves six to eight.

3 Tbs. olive oil
2 28-oz. cans whole tomatoes
1 lb. yellow onions, halved and thinly sliced (about 3 medium)
1¼ tsp. kosher salt
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ cup heavy cream
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
1 lb. rigatoni
1 lb. 1- to 1½-inch cauliflower florets (about 4 cups)
10 oz. shredded Fontina (about 2½ cups)
2 oz. freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (about ¾ cup)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Bring a pot of well-salted water to boil in a large pot with a pasta insert. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with 1 Tbs. olive oil.

Pour off 1 cup of juice from one of the cans of tomatoes and discard it. In a blender or food processor, purée both cans of tomatoes with their remaining juice and set aside.

Heat the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil in a 6- to 8-qt. Dutch oven or heavy-based pot over medium-high heat. When the oil is shimmering, about 1 minute, add the onions and ¼ tsp. of the salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until nicely browned, 5 to 10 minutes. Push the onions to the side of the Dutch oven with a wooden spoon and add the garlic. Cook until it just starts to sizzle and becomes fragrant, about 10 seconds.

Add the puréed tomatoes and cream (be careful; it will splatter), plus the remaining 1 tsp. salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce to a gentle simmer, and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, so that the sauce thickens slightly. Add the parsley and the red pepper flakes, and cook until the flavors are melded, about 5 minutes more. Taste for salt and pepper and remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, when the salted water comes to a boil, cook the rigatoni until it's al dente, about 10 minutes. Drain the pasta by lifting out the insert and leaving the water in the pot. Add the pasta to the sauce. Return the water to a boil (with the pasta insert in the pot) and cook the cauliflower until barely tender, about 2 minutes. Drain and add it to the sauce.

Add 1½ cups of the shredded Fontina to the pasta mixture and toss well. Transfer to the prepared baking dish and spread evenly. Top the pasta with the remaining 1 cup Fontina and then the Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Bake uncovered until the cheese is golden brown, about 15 minutes. Let the pasta rest for 10 minutes before serving.

—Tony Rosenfeld,
Fine Cooking *#69*



Classic Macaroni & Cheese

Serves six to eight.

This dish will taste best if you assemble it ahead of baking time so the pasta can soak up the sauce. But sprinkle on the crumb topping just before baking. The recipe calls for a 9x13-inch baking dish, but it's also nice to use individual ramekins.

1 lb. macaroni
14 Tbs. (7 oz.) unsalted butter
6 Tbs. all-purpose flour
½ medium onion, thinly sliced
1 bay leaf
1 sprig fresh thyme
9 black peppercorns (optional)
4½ cups whole milk
2 tsp. table salt
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
Pinch nutmeg
6 cups (1 lb.) finely grated sharp Cheddar
1¼ cups coarse fresh breadcrumbs

Heat the oven to 375°F and butter a 9x13-inch baking dish. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and add the macaroni; cook according to package directions until just tender and drain well.

Melt 12 Tbs. of the butter in a heavy-based medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour, onion, bay leaf, thyme, and peppercorns; reduce the heat to medium low and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly, to make a roux. Slowly whisk the milk into the roux until smooth and blended. Raise the heat to medium high; whisk constantly until the mixture boils. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring constantly, until thickened. Lower the heat and continue simmering for about 10 minutes, stirring constantly.

Strain the sauce into a large bowl, removing the onion, herbs, and peppercorns. Add the salt, pepper, nutmeg, and Cheddar, stirring until the cheese is just melted. Toss the pasta with the cheese sauce and pour the mixture into the baking dish.

Melt the last 2 Tbs. butter and toss with the breadcrumbs. Spread the buttered crumbs over the casserole. Bake until sizzling and lightly browned, about 40 minutes, less time for individual dishes (cover with foil if the top browns too quickly).

—Mary Pult & Rebecca Fasten,
Fine Cooking *#23*



Cavatappi with Roasted Peppers, Capocollo & Ricotta

Serves four.

Capocollo is a lightly aged pork sausage usually flavored with white wine and nutmeg. If you can't find it, an excellent substitute is prosciutto di Parma.

Olive oil
5 medium red bell peppers
1 large onion, thinly sliced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped (or one 14.5-oz. can diced tomatoes, drained)
⅓ lb. very thinly sliced capocollo, chopped
A few large sprigs fresh thyme, leaves chopped
1½ cups fresh ricotta
1½ cups heavy cream, preferably not ultrapasteurized
1 to 2 tsp. finely grated orange zest
Pinch nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
1 lb. cavatappi (or fusilli or penne)
¼ cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano
⅓ cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Lightly coat a large shallow baking dish with olive oil.

Roast the peppers by turning them over the flames of a gas burner until the skins are charred or by putting them under a broiler, turning until all sides are well blistered. When they're cool enough to handle, peel off the skins, core and seed the peppers, and cut the flesh into thin strips.

Heat the oven to 425°F. In a large skillet, heat about 3 Tbs. of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to soften. Add the peppers, season with salt and pepper, and sauté until soft and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook another 5 minutes. Turn off the heat and add the capocollo and thyme. Mix and set aside.

In a medium bowl, combine the ricotta, cream, orange zest, and nutmeg. Season with salt and pepper and whisk until smooth (you can do this in a food processor if you like).

Cook the cavatappi in the boiling water until al dente. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, toss the Pecorino with the breadcrumbs. Season with salt and pepper and add a drizzle of olive oil. Mix well.

Drain the pasta well and return it to the pot. Add the pepper mixture and toss. Add the ricotta mixture, toss again, and taste for seasoning.

Pour the pasta into the baking dish. Top with an even coating of the breadcrumb mixture and a drizzle of fresh olive oil. Bake uncovered until browned and bubbling, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve right away.

—Erica DeMane,
Fine Cooking *#37*

Photos: Scott Phillips



Baked Ziti with Tomato, Mozzarella & Sausage

Serves four.

Try to find freshly made ricotta and mozzarella to see how good this rustic dish can be.

Olive oil
1 large onion, cut into small dice
¾ lb. sweet Italian pork sausage, removed from its casing and crumbled
2 cloves garlic, minced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup dry red wine
1 35-oz. can whole plum tomatoes, chopped, with their juice
¼ cup chopped fresh marjoram or oregano (from about 6 large sprigs)
1 cup fresh ricotta
1 cup freshly grated mild Pecorino Romano
⅓ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Pinch nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
1 lb. ziti
½ lb. mozzarella, preferably fresh, cut into small cubes

Heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly oil a large, shallow baking dish. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

In a large skillet, heat about 2 Tbs. of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the crumbled sausage and garlic and sauté until the sausage starts to brown. Season with salt and pepper. If the sausage gives off a lot of fat, pour off most of it, but leave a little to add flavor to the sauce. Add the red wine and let it boil until it's almost gone. Add the tomatoes with all of their juice and cook, uncovered, at a lively simmer for about 10 minutes. The sauce will thicken slightly. Add the marjoram or oregano and taste for seasoning.

In a large bowl, mix the ricotta, about half the Pecorino, the parsley, and the nutmeg. Season with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, cook the ziti in the boiling water until al dente. Drain well and toss it with the ricotta mixture until well coated. Add the sausage sauce and mix again. Add the mozzarella and toss gently. Pour everything into the baking dish and sprinkle the remaining Pecorino on top. Bake uncovered until lightly browned and bubbling, about 20 minutes. Serve right away.

—Erica DeMane,
Fine Cooking *#37*



Spaghetti with Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts

Serves four.

Sage and mushrooms are one of those perfect culinary combinations. Another plus for this recipe is that the portabellas make it feel substantially "meaty," although the dish itself is meatless. Scraping out the gills of the portabellas keeps them from turning the pasta a grayish color.

Kosher salt
¾ lb. spaghetti
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup unsalted butter
3 large portabella mushroom caps, gills scraped out and discarded, caps thinly sliced and cut into 2-inch pieces
Freshly ground black pepper
⅔ cup loosely packed fresh sage leaves
⅓ cup toasted walnuts, coarsely chopped
½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the spaghetti and cook until al dente, about 9 minutes. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water and then drain the pasta and set aside.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil and 2 Tbs. of the butter in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until the butter is melted. Add the mushrooms, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're brown and tender, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer the mushrooms to a bowl and set aside.

In the same skillet, melt the remaining 6 Tbs. butter over medium heat. Add the sage leaves and cook, stirring occasionally, until they darken and crisp and the flecks of milk solids in the butter are golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Return the mushrooms to the pan and pile in the walnuts, the cooked pasta, and ½ cup of the pasta water. Toss the pasta continuously with tongs to coat well, adding more water as needed so the pasta is moist, 1 to 2 minutes. (If your skillet isn't big enough, you can toss everything together in the pasta pot.) Season with salt and pepper, mound into bowls, and sprinkle generously with the Parmigiano. Serve immediately.

—Arlene Jacobs
Fine Cooking *#57*

Oil & pasta water don't mix

If you're in the habit of adding a little oil to the cooking water to keep the pasta from sticking, here's a good reason to stop: Pasta that's cooked in oily water becomes oily itself, and as a result, the sauce slides off, doesn't get absorbed, and you have less flavorful pasta. You can avoid sticking by stirring the pasta often at the start of cooking.

And while adding oil may keep the pasta water from boiling over, you can also prevent this problem by making sure you use a large pot and by reducing the heat a little (but still maintaining a boil).



Baked Fettuccine with Asparagus, Lemon, Pine Nuts & Mascarpone

Serves four.

Mascarpone is a rich Italian cream cheese. It usually comes in a plastic tub and is available at most supermarkets. Grana Padano is a hard Italian grating cheese similar to Parmigiano but with a milder flavor and a lower price.

2 Tbs. olive oil; more for the baking dish
2 lb. medium-thick asparagus, ends trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces on an angle
8 scallions, whites and tender greens cut into thin rounds
Finely grated zest from 2 lemons
Juice from 1 lemon (about 4 Tbs.)
A few sprigs fresh thyme or savory, leaves chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 cup whole milk
1 cup mascarpone
1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano
Small pinch cayenne
Generous pinch ground allspice
¾ cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs
1 lb. fresh fettuccine
½ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted

Heat the oven to 450°F. Lightly coat a large shallow baking dish with olive oil. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the asparagus pieces and blanch until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. With a large slotted spoon, transfer them to a colander, and run under cold water to preserve their green color. Drain well. Keep the water boiling for the pasta.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the scallions and sauté for 1 minute to soften. Add the asparagus and sauté briefly, about 1 minute. Take the skillet off the heat and add half of the zest, the lemon juice, and the thyme or savory. Season with salt and pepper, mix well, and reserve.

In a medium saucepan, heat the butter and flour over medium heat, whisking until smooth. Cook for 1 minute, whisking constantly, to cook away the raw taste of the flour. Add the milk and cook, whisking all the while, until it comes to a boil. Lower the heat a bit and cook until smooth and slightly thickened (to about the consistency of heavy cream), 3 to 4 minutes.

Turn off the heat and add the remaining lemon zest, the mascarpone, and ½ cup of the Grana Padano, whisking until the mixture is fairly smooth (there will be a slight grainy texture from the cheese). Season with the cayenne, the allspice, and more salt and pepper.

In a small bowl, combine the breadcrumbs and the remaining Grana Padano. Season with salt and pepper and add a drizzle of olive oil. Mix well.

Return the cooking water to a full boil and cook the fettuccine, leaving it slightly underdone. Drain well. Return the fettuccine to the cooking pot. Add the pine nuts, the mascarpone sauce, and the asparagus mixture. Toss and taste for seasoning.

Pour into the baking dish and sprinkle the breadcrumb mixture evenly over the top. Bake uncovered until bubbling and golden, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve right away.

—Erica DeMane,
Fine Cooking *#37*

Don't skimp on the salt

When you bring a pot of water to a boil to cook pasta, be sure to add a generous amount of salt. Well-salted water seasons the pasta internally as it absorbs liquid and swells. If the pasta is sufficiently salted during boiling, the pasta dish may even require less salt overall.

For one pound of pasta, use 4 quarts of water and 2 Tbs. of kosher salt: the water should taste as salty as seawater.



Campanelle with Broccoli Raab, Sausage & Olives

Serves three to four.

Kosher salt
1 lb. broccoli raab, thick stems trimmed, leaves and florets rinsed well
6 oz. campanelle pasta (2 cups)
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
¾ lb. sweet Italian sausage (bulk sausage or links removed from casing)
3 cloves garlic, minced
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
¾ cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth
½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, quartered
2 tsp. finely grated lightly packed lemon zest
⅓ cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano

Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil over high heat. Have a bowl of ice water ready. Add the broccoli raab to the boiling water and cook until bright green and tender, 2 minutes (the water doesn't have to come back to a full boil once the broccoli raab has been added). With tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the broccoli raab to the bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Drain well and gently squeeze the broccoli raab to remove excess water.

Return the pot of water to a boil, add the pasta, cook according to package directions, and drain.

While the campanelle cooks, heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and cook, stirring and breaking it into smaller pieces with a wooden spoon until it's browned and almost cooked through, 4 to 6 minutes. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and cook until the garlic is lightly golden, about 1 minute. Pour in the broth and bring to a boil; cook, scraping the pan with a wooden spoon occasionally, until the broth is reduced by about half, 3 to 4 minutes.

Add the broccoli raab, olives, and lemon zest and cook, stirring, until hot, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the pasta and cheese to the skillet and toss well. Season to taste with salt and serve immediately.

—David Bonom,
Fine Cooking *#71*

quick & delicious

Around the world in seven quick recipes

BY LORI LONGBOTHAM

Grab your passport, fire up your broiler, and get ready to cook your way around the world. Each of these recipes cooks under the broiler, which, like grilling, gives food great flavor lickety-split. The only hard part will be deciding which dish to make tonight. Will it be the English deviled pork chops or the French lamb chops with lemon-thyme butter? Jamaican jerk chicken drumsticks or Mexican chicken thighs? Teriyaki tuna or Asian beef barbecue? Whichever recipe you choose, don't worry about having to trot the globe to rustle up the ingredients—most are readily available at your supermarket.

Broiling tips

No preheating is necessary. Not only does the broiler cook food quickly, it heats up in just a few minutes, unlike the oven which can take 15 to 20 minutes to reach the desired temperature. So just turn it on and get ready to cook.

Be ready to move the pan around. Take a close look at your broiler and see how it releases its heat. If the heat is concentrated right down the center of the oven, arrange the food right down the center of the broiler pan. Most broilers have hot and cool spots, so be ready to move the broiler pan around to compensate.

Some pieces may cook faster than others. The pieces you're broiling won't be exactly the same size, so they won't cook in the same amount of time; remove what's done and continue to cook anything that needs more time.



Jerk Chicken Drumsticks

Serves five to six.

10 thin scallions, white and tender green parts, coarsely chopped
1 Scotch bonnet or habanero chile, seeded and coarsely chopped
2 Tbs. distilled white-wine vinegar
1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves
3 medium cloves garlic, chopped
1¼ tsp. ground allspice
1 tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
10 chicken drumsticks (3½ lb.)
Vegetable oil or cooking spray for the pan

In a food processor, pulse the scallions, chiles, vinegar, thyme, garlic, allspice, salt, and pepper to a thick paste.

Transfer the paste to a large bowl, add the chicken, and toss to coat. Let stand for 10 minutes.

Position an oven rack in the center of the oven and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Oil the pan or coat with cooking spray. Arrange the chicken on the broiler pan. Season generously on all sides with salt.

Broil the chicken in the center of the oven, turning once after about 10 minutes, until fully cooked and nicely browned in spots, about 20 minutes total. Transfer to a platter and serve.

Tip: Scotch bonnet chiles are authentic, but they're very hot and can be hard to find; the habanero chile is a good substitute. If you want to tame the heat, use less habanero or Scotch bonnet but don't substitute a less spicy variety.



Asian-Style Beef Barbecue in Lettuce Packages

Serves four.

¾ cup long-grain white rice
½ tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
2 medium hearts of romaine or 1 large head red or green leaf lettuce, separated into leaves
1 cup small cilantro sprigs
1 cup small mint leaves (or larger leaves torn into small pieces)
6 medium radishes, thinly sliced (about ¾ cup)
½ cup thinly sliced scallions, including tender green parts
½ cup hoisin sauce (I like Koon Chun brand)
1 lb. flank steak, 1 inch thick
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 tsp. sesame seeds

Bring 1½ cups water to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Add the rice and salt, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer gently until the rice is tender and the water absorbed, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, arrange the lettuce leaves in a bowl and set the cilantro, mint, radishes, and scallions in separate piles on a plate. In a small bowl, combine ¼ cup of the hoisin with 2 Tbs. water; reserve for assembly.

Position an oven rack 5 to 6 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Season the steak with a large pinch of salt and the pepper. Broil the steak until it loses its raw appearance on top and begins to brown, about 3 minutes. Brush the steak with about 2 Tbs. the remaining hoisin, and broil until lightly browned, 2 minutes longer. Turn the steak over with tongs and broil until it begins to brown, about 3 minutes. Brush generously with the remaining hoisin, and broil 2 to 3 minutes longer for medium rare (130°F on an instant-read thermometer), or to desired doneness (don't let the hoisin burn; if necessary, move the pan to a lower rack).

Transfer the steak to a cutting board, sprinkle with the sesame seeds, and let rest for 5 minutes. Cut into thin slices across the grain at a slight angle. Arrange the steak and rice in separate bowls. Let diners assemble their own packages, filling the lettuce leaves with the rice, steak, cilantro, mint, radishes, scallions, and a drizzle of the diluted hoisin.



Tuna Teriyaki with Scallion Salad

Serves four.

6 Tbs. soy sauce
3 Tbs. firmly packed dark brown sugar
1 tsp. finely grated fresh ginger
1 medium clove garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp. Asian sesame oil
4 6-oz. tuna steaks, 1 inch thick
⅛ tsp. ground cayenne
8 slender scallions, dark green parts only, trimmed and thinly sliced diagonally (about ¾ cup)
¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves
2 Tbs. rice vinegar

Make the teriyaki sauce: Bring the soy sauce, brown sugar, ginger, and garlic to a boil over medium-high heat in a small saucepan. Boil until the mixture has thickened slightly, about 2 minutes. Stir in ½ tsp. of the sesame oil.

Broil the tuna: Position an oven rack 5 to 6 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Season the tuna on both sides with the cayenne and arrange on the broiler pan. Broil the tuna for 2 minutes, brush generously with the teriyaki sauce, and broil until the glaze sets, about 2 minutes longer.

Turn the tuna over with a spatula and broil for 2 minutes, brush generously with the teriyaki sauce, and broil until the tuna is pale pink in the center or to desired doneness (cut into a piece to check), about 2 minutes longer. Brush with any remaining teriyaki sauce.

Meanwhile, stir together the scallions, cilantro, vinegar, and the remaining ½ tsp. sesame oil. Transfer the tuna to serving plates, top with the scallion salad, and serve.

Tip: If your scallions are large and strong-flavored, slice them as thinly as you can and soak them in ice water for 10 to 15 minutes. Dry the scallions on paper towels before making the salad.

Photos: Scott Phillips



Colossal Shrimp with Watercress & Tomato Salad

Serves four.

1 clove garlic
1 tsp. kosher salt
1 small red onion, finely diced (about ¾ cup)
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
6 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
3 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
3 tsp. finely grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon)
⅜ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
8 colossal shrimp (6 to 8 count; about 1 lb.), peeled and deveined
2 pints red or yellow grape or cherry tomatoes, or a combination, halved
8 cups watercress sprigs, washed and dried (from about 8 oz. untrimmed watercress)

Peel and chop the garlic clove. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp. of the salt and, using the side of a chef's knife, mash and scrape the garlic into a paste. Transfer to a medium bowl and whisk in half the onion, 2 Tbs. of the olive oil, 2 Tbs. of the parsley, 1 Tbs. of the lemon juice, 1 tsp. of the zest, and a generous ⅛ tsp. pepper. Add the shrimp and marinate, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, in another bowl, stir together the tomatoes, ¾ tsp. salt, the remaining onion, and the remaining ¼ cup olive oil, ¼ cup parsley, 2 Tbs. lemon juice, 2 tsp. zest, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Stir from time to time.

Position an oven rack 3 to 4 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Arrange the shrimp on the broiler pan. Broil until the shrimp are beginning to turn bright pink and are firm to the touch on top, about 3 minutes. Turn the shrimp over, rotate the broiler pan from back to front, and broil until the shrimp are just opaque throughout (cut into a piece to check), 1 to 2 minutes longer.

To serve, arrange the watercress on 4 plates, top with the tomatoes and their sauce, and arrange 2 shrimp on top.

Tip: To help the shrimp cook evenly, arrange them on the broiler pan in a line that will be directly under the broiler element.



Lamb Chops with Lemon, Thyme & Mustard Butter

Serves four.

4 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
1 tsp. whole-grain Dijon mustard
1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, lightly chopped
¾ tsp. finely grated lemon zest
⅛ tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more as needed
8 lamb loin chops (1½- to 2-inch-thick chops; about 3 lb.), trimmed

In a small bowl, mash together the butter, mustard, thyme, zest, salt, and pepper until well combined. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Position an oven rack 5 to 6 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Arrange the chops on the pan. Season both sides of the lamb generously with salt and pepper. Broil until the first side is well-browned, about 8 minutes. Turn the chops over with tongs and continue to broil until they're well browned and the center is cooked to your liking, 3 to 5 minutes longer for medium rare (cut into a chop near the bone to check).

Transfer the lamb to serving plates and top each chop with a dab of the flavored butter. Serve hot.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with sautéed haricots verts and tiny boiled potatoes.



Lime Chicken with Poblano Sour Cream

Serves four.

4 large poblano chiles
1 large lime
½ cup sour cream or Mexican crema
2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro, plus a few sprigs for garnish (optional)
2 tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
1 Tbs. ground coriander
1 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
8 medium (5- to 6-oz.) bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Position an oven rack 5 to 6 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Broil the poblanos, turning 3 times, until blackened, 12 to 15 minutes total. Put the poblanos in a medium bowl, top with a dinner plate, and let stand for 5 minutes.

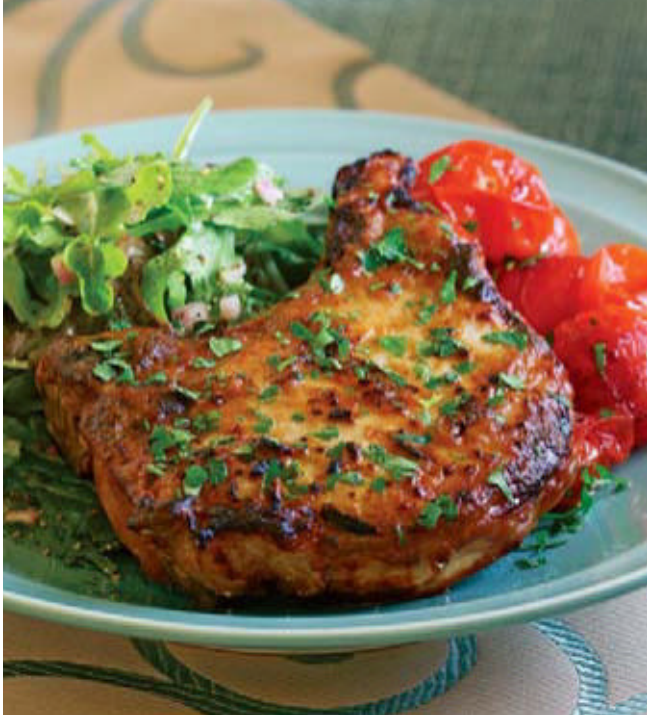
Meanwhile, cut the lime in half. Cut one half into wedges and squeeze the other half to get 2 tsp. juice. Measure the juice into a small bowl and stir in the sour cream or crema and the chopped cilantro.

Transfer the poblanos to a cutting board to cool a bit, then peel away the burned skin, discard the stems and seeds, and cut into ½-inch dice. Add to the sour cream mixture and stir to combine. Season to taste with salt.

In a small bowl, combine the 2 tsp. salt with the coriander, cumin, and pepper. Coat the chicken with the oil and season on both sides with the spice mixture. Put the chicken skin-side down on the broiler pan, and broil until well browned, 7 to 10 minutes. Turn the chicken over with tongs and continue to broil, checking frequently, until the chicken is dark brown and cooked through (an instant-read thermometer should register at least 165°F), 4 to 6 minutes more. If the chicken threatens to burn before it's cooked through, move the pan to a lower rack.

Transfer the chicken to serving plates, spoon the poblano sour cream on the side, and garnish with cilantro sprigs, if using, and the lime wedges for squeezing over the chicken. Serve hot.

Tip: Look for Mexican crema in the dairy case or near the tortillas in supermarkets. To make your own, see p. 70.



Deviled Pork Chops

Serves four.

¼ cup Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. firmly packed dark brown sugar
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
¼ tsp. ground cayenne
4 1-inch-thick, bone-in, center-cut loin pork chops (2½ to 3 lb.)
Kosher salt
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

Stir together the mustard, brown sugar, lemon juice, Worcestershire, and cayenne in a small bowl.

Position an oven rack 3 to 4 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line the bottom of a broiler pan with foil and replace the perforated top part of the pan. Arrange the pork on the broiler pan and season generously on both sides with salt. Brush about half of the mustard mixture over the top of the chops. Broil until the chops are deeply browned in spots, 6 to 8 minutes. Turn the chops over with tongs, brush with the remaining mustard mixture, and continue to broil until the pork is browned and just cooked through (an instant-read thermometer in the center of a chop should register 145°F), about 5 minutes more. Let rest a few minutes before serving. Sprinkle the better-looking sides of the chops with the parsley, if using, and transfer to serving plates.

Lori Longbotham is a New York City-based food writer and recipe developer. ◆